

**WOLFSKINS AND TOGAS:
LESBIAN AND GAY HISTORICAL FICTIONS,
1870 TO THE PRESENT**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of historical reference in the representation of homosexuality in British literature since the late nineteenth century. The texts it examines are both literal fictions - novels, short stories and poems - and less 'imaginative' forms, such as biography, historiography and sexology: its main project is to disentangle the network of discourses facilitating and restricting representation of the homosexual past. It identifies the history of this representation as a series of moments - the turn of the century, the 1930s, the 1950s, for example - when homosexuality was redefined, and lesbian and gay traditions correspondingly reinvented. This continual reinvention was often the work of homosexuals themselves: the thesis demonstrates how historical representation has allowed lesbians and gay men to intervene in sexual debate when more obviously 'contemporary' dissident voices were being publicly silenced. Chapters 1 and 2 examine the invocation of historical example within the late Victorian homophile subculture, and argue that the ancient Greek practice of *paiderastia* provided turn-of-the-century homosexuals with an affirmative model with which to counter juridical and sexological prescription. Chapters 3 and 4 consider the extent to which Antinous and Sappho became established in the same period as homosexual icons, but were subtly reconstructed by different, sometimes competing, sexual discourses. Subsequent chapters explore the influence of literary models such as Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) upon lesbian historical fiction and biography of the 1930s, and uncover some hitherto forgotten lesbian texts; examine the role of male homosexuality in the women's historical romance of the 1950s; and discuss the homoerotic historical fiction of lesbian authors Mary Renault and Bryher. The final chapter considers recent lesbian and gay historical fiction, and finds reflected in the genre the modern homosexual self-image with all its gender and racial tensions.

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INTRODUCTION

For as long as 'homosexuality' has been available for meaningful deployment, commentators have understood it to be a category with a history. Whether same-sex desire has been conceptualised as gender inversion, as 'intermediacy', as psycho-sexual dysfunction or as political identification, critics have found its symptoms and its effects in the past as well as the present, and endowed its modern subjects with elaborate, sometimes prestigious, genealogies. 'Sapphists' and 'lesbians', 'ganymedes' and 'Oscar Wildes',¹ same-sex lovers have often been defined - and frequently defined themselves - with reference to the historical cultures, subcultures and icons whose habits they appear, perhaps bathetically, to reproduce.

The process of retrospection, indeed, has often accompanied and inspired that of homosexual definition, and vice versa. For many of the most influential contributors to the nineteenth century's new debates on 'urningism' and inversion, for example, homosexuality was a phenomenon to be understood and labelled via the recovery of ancient models: the very term 'Urning', of course - coined by Karl Ulrichs to explain his concept of the 'anima muliebris virili corpore inclusa', or 'woman's soul in a male body' - was inspired by Pausanias' speech in favour of 'Uranian' love in Plato's *Symposium*.² The literature and artefacts of ancient Greece, in fact, have consistently reassured modern homosexuals that their proscribed and derided passions are worthy of study and respect, and have correspondingly been a primary reference-point of gay and lesbian self-definition. But other key periods and figures in homosexuality's long and shifting 'history' - ancient Rome, ancient Persia, the Renaissance; Michelangelo, Shakespeare, Marie

¹ For more on the prevalence of the 'Oscar Wilde' label in the twentieth century, and a discussion of its implications, see Alan Sinfield's *The Wilde Century* (London, 1994).

² Hubert Kennedy, *Ulrichs: The Life and Works of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Pioneer of the Modern Gay Movement* (Boston, 1988).

Antoinette - have recurred as touchstones of homosexual commentary and debate.

This thesis examines the role of historical reference in the literary representation of homosexuality, from the emergence of modern homosexual categories and discourses in the late nineteenth century, to the present. It is concerned primarily with the ways in which homosexuals themselves have appealed to historical example in defence, definition and celebration, but it also considers the place of history in relevant non- and anti-gay writing. Hitherto, the history it uncovers has been retrieved only sketchily, or partially: though many lesbian and gay critics have noted the more clamorous or prestigious examples of homosexual historiography - the Hellenism of Symonds and Wilde, for example; the Sapphism of Vivien and Barney - none have produced the kind of overview I am attempting here, an overview which finds a range of writers invoking a variety of references. Despite its broadly chronological structure, however, the thesis is more than a simple survey. Homosexual literature and art has always been saturated with historical reference; I have not attempted to give a definitive or comprehensive account of the past century of lesbian and gay historical writing (even supposing such a thing were possible, or desirable). Rather, I have isolated particular moments - the 1890s, the 1930s, the 1950s, for example - when historical reference seemed particularly dense and cohesive; when clusters of historical fictions appeared in meaningful formations. I have, in other words, made the *fact* of retrospection my starting-point: I am interested not simply in *why* authors have repeatedly appealed to historical example in their representations of homosexuality, but in *how* the appeals were made, and which *particular* histories they targeted. How did these histories intersect with or negotiate canonized historical narrative, and contemporary discourses of sexuality? Which homosexual histories *might* have been written, that were not?³

Above all, I am interested in the ways in which retrospection and representation have *changed*, as 'homosexuality' itself, even in its relatively brief modern form, has changed. Historical narratives and icons that seemed appropriate homosexual models in an era dominated by inversion theories lost their pertinence when same-sex desire was

³ Such questions have rarely been asked; for thoughtful approaches to the issues, and not simply the fact, of lesbian and gay historiography, see Scott Bravmann, 'Isaac Julien's *Looking For Langston*: Hughes, Biography and Queer(ed) History', in *Cultural Studies*, 7 (2) (May 1993), pp. 311-23, and Katie King, 'Audre Lorde's Lacquered Layerings: The Lesbian Bar as Site of Literary Production', in Sally Munt (ed.), *New Lesbian Criticism: Literary and Cultural Readings* (Hemel Hempstead, 1992), pp. 51-74.

reconceptualised psychoanalytically; ancient Sapphic or paiderastic elites, appealing to a literary homosexual sub-culture dominated by the wealthy and the aristocratic, are less compatible with the current lesbian and gay self-image. But it is not simply that historical models have blossomed and withered, found favour or fallen into disrepute; individual figures and narratives have been endlessly reinvented, pressed into new moulds under the weight of modern homosexual discourses. As I have already suggested, in the history of homosexual representation certain historical narratives and icons recur again and again. They usually (but not necessarily) have some homosexual content or reputation to attract the interested commentator; but in each cultural moment, they are reconstructed rather differently.

Underpinning this thesis, then, is the premise that an historical fiction tells us less about the past than about the circumstances of its own production - reveals, if nothing else, the historiographical priorities of its author, or its author's culture. This is as true of non-fictional historical narratives as of fictional ones - indeed, as the deliberately pluralised "fictions" of my title should suggest, the range of my analysis in this thesis will not be restricted to novels and stories, nor even extend merely to poems and plays: I shall be considering, too, biography, historiography, and sexology; ultimately, I use the term "fictions" rather as Claude J. Summers has used it, to include both *gay fictions* and *fictions of gayness*.⁴ My main project has been to tease out the networks of discourses and intertexts facilitating and limiting representation of the homosexual past.

This is particularly evident in those chapters - chapter 3, for example, which examines the variety of turn-of-the-century representations of Antinous, handsome attendant to the Emperor Hadrian - which are concerned less with the evolution of historical fictions *between* eras than with the discursive competitions *within* them. Precisely because lesbian and gay histories often intersect with more traditional historical narratives, the past has frequently become a site of contention over specifically (homo)sexual issues. In times of particularly intense homosexual debate (such as the *fin de siècle*), suggestive figures like the enigmatic Antinous have been reborn in fiction and biography into a variety of bodies and dramas, each of which represents a slightly different version or 'story' of homosexuality. The weaving path taken by Antinous

⁴ Claude J. Summers, *Gay Fictions: Wilde to Stonewall* (New York, 1990). For Summers' own definition and defence of the term, see p. 11.

fictions in the decades flanking the turn of the century thus offers us one, particularly scenic, route through the period's discursive landscape; subsequent chapters identify other figures - Sappho, Richard I - who have enjoyed a similar status as repositories and registers of sexual speculation and cultural anxiety.

If the sheer range of homosexual stories in which such figures have been cast as exemplary protagonists is striking, then impressive too is the durability of particular narratives, and the ingenuity with which they have been mapped onto the biographies of a range of sometimes unlikely individuals. We might expect historical representation to identify a fundamental difference or distance between the homosexual bodies and behaviours of the present and the past; what the following chapters reveal is that historical fictions are frequently media in which modern homosexual paradigms and stereotypes are not at their weakest, but at their most potent. Moreover, historical representation has allowed critics and champions of homosexuality alike not just to replay modern sexual debates, but to intervene in them. To call Christina of Sweden a "Girton girl on a throne", for example, as biographer Francis Gribble did in 1913, is to make a point both about the lesbian Queen herself and, more insidiously, about Girton girls - already characterised in medical discourse as dangerously brain-cultured and unfeminine.⁵ But to retell Christina's story as that of Stephen Gordon, the inverted heroine of Radclyffe Hall's notorious *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) - as, as we shall see in chapter 6, lesbian writer Margaret Goldsmith did in the 1930s - is to revive, in covert fashion, a suppressed homosexual apologia. Repeatedly, over the past century, historical representation has allowed lesbians and gay men to speak when more obviously contemporary deviant voices were being publicly silenced.

History and genre

The shape of the fictions I shall be examining here has, of course, been determined not

⁵ Francis Gribble, *The Court of Christina of Sweden, and the Later Adventures of the Queen in Exile* (London, 1913), p. 61. I discuss this and other early twentieth-century biographies of the Queen more fully in "A Girton Girl on a Throne": Queen Christina and Versions of Lesbianism', *Feminist Review*, 46 (Spring 1994), pp. 41-60.

only by shifting homosexual models, but by changing historiographical ones: this thesis is also a history of the terms and conditions on which 'history' itself has been available for literary deployment in general, and homosexual manipulation in particular. Since at least the nineteenth century, historiography has provided a forum for the debating of controversial issues, and the playing-out of transgressive fantasies; this, as we shall see, is partly what has made the past so susceptible to gay appropriation. In the 1920s, with the simultaneous emergence of new, post-Freudian biographical conventions (Strachey's *Queen Victoria* [1921] and *Elizabeth and Essex* [1928] were milestones here⁶), and newly codified popular historical genres (the thrillers of John Buchan, the romances of Georgette Heyer⁷) historical representation became both more adventurous and potentially more disreputable; the historical novel, in particular, has never recovered the prestige it enjoyed amongst nineteenth-century writers and readers. For that very reason, however, the genre has often allowed a depiction of radical social and sexual arrangements unthinkable in less 'escapist' media: as historical novelist Naomi Mitchison once wryly pointed out, "apparently it's all right when people wear wolfskins and togas".⁸ The texts discussed in the second half of this thesis are more recognisable as 'historical fictions' than the poems, dramas and essays of the first; these later chapters consider homosexuals both as the genre's producers (and, implicitly, its consumers) and as its subject. Though seldom acknowledged by histories of the genre, lesbians and gay men have always loomed large in these roles.

With the standard studies of the historical genre, indeed, I have rarely found it fruitful to engage. Until recently, of course, there simply was no established relevant criticism: Avrom Fleishman's *The English Historical Novel* (1971) was the first full-length study of the genre since Georg Lukács' 1937 *The Historical Novel*. Fleishman challenges Lukács' Marxist approach but, like him, understands the historical novel to operate via the delineation of historical 'types'. Such types are, as Ruth Hoberman has pointed out, necessarily male; they are also implicitly heterosexual: neither women nor

⁶ For a discussion of Strachey's biographies, and the crisis in biographical convention they reflected, see Suzanne Raitt, *Vita and Virginia: The Work and Friendship of V. Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf* (Oxford, 1993), chapter 1.

⁷ Alison Light discusses "the shaping of bestselling forms of fiction into a recognisable typology, which took significantly new commercial impetus in the period between the wars", in her *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London and New York, 1991), p. 160.

⁸ Naomi Mitchison, *You May Well Ask: A Memoir 1920-1940* (London, 1979), p. 179.

homosexuals will be the object of "the quest for a past that will represent the historical whole" that constitutes the traditional project of both the genre and its theorists.⁹

Subsequent critics have found themselves increasingly preoccupied with establishing a taxonomy of historical fictions. These range from basic but rather shaky distinctions between 'historical novel' and 'historical romance', 'period novel' and 'nostalgia novel',¹⁰ to the elaborate schemata of theorists attempting particularly to address the considerable postmodernist contribution to the genre.¹¹ Preoccupation with the *form* of the historical novel, however, has obstructed analysis of its content (when Mary Renault or Marguerite Yourcenar are discussed, for example, it is rarely as the producers of lesbian or gay male fiction); it has also discouraged examination of the broader cultural fiction-making in which the historical novel is only one, perhaps over-privileged, participant.

The *kinds* of historical fiction that critics address is also significant: almost invariably, they have followed Fleishman's example in distinguishing in favour of the masters of the genre (Scott, Dickens, Faulkner; more recently, Barth, Pynchon and Doctorow) as opposed - in Fleishman's words - to "the Georgette Heyers and C. S. Foresters".¹² Popular fiction, women's historical romances, are relegated beyond the scope of most studies: the genre's theorists have left the historical novel that might be accountable to lesbian or gay experience precisely undelineated as a field of study.

For this particular history of lesbian and gay historical fiction(s), then, I have had occasionally to reinterpret some canonical texts (precisely, the novels of Mary Renault), but more often to look beyond the historical canon, into middle-brow fiction and popular culture. Particularly unmistakable in the following chapters will be the proximity between homosexual retrospection and *romance* - something, again, which may have deflected academic interest from the texts I shall be discussing. Like most romances, lesbian and gay historical fictions seem incapable of approaching the erotic relationships of the past

⁹ Ruth Hoberman, 'Multiplying the Past: Gender and Narrative in Bryher's *Gate to the Sea*', *Contemporary Literature*, 31 (3) (Fall 1990), pp. 354-72, p. 357.

¹⁰ See, for example, Rhona Martin's *Writing Historical Fiction* (London, 1988).

¹¹ For example, Maria Allemano, *Historical Portraits and Visions: From Walter Scott's Waverley to Michel Tournier's Le Roi des Aulnes and Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow* (New York and London, 1991).

¹² Avrom Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf* (Baltimore and London, 1971), p. xvii.

via any other than an anachronistic model of timeless 'true love', a model in which, as Catherine Belsey has demonstrated, the alingual, ahistorical body continually threatens to overwhelm the reason of the desiring subject.¹³ Belsey, however, analyses the true love model as it functions in heterosexual romances; it is clearly important to recognise that such a model may have a very different significance when deployed by a lesbian and gay culture which, traditionally, has had more to lose by *not* prioritising the imperatives of its desiring bodies. In all post-sexological homosexual representations, in which homosexuality itself is understood as the biological or psychological compulsion of one individual towards another of the same sex, the homosexual past *must* be constituted by a series of romances (if, all too often, thwarted ones); for lesbians and gay men in particular, anxious precisely to see historiography made accountable to their marginalised desires, the past might even be *best* presented as a series of romances. As Eve Sedgwick points out, lesbians' and gay men's "sense of constituting precisely a *gap* in the discursive fabric of the given" renders them eager for a form of ontological reassurance that constructionist historiography does not always provide.¹⁴ We should not, therefore, underestimate the value of gay and lesbian historical romances in their affirmation of the transhistorical tenacity of outlawed desires. Underpinning this thesis is the premise that homosexual retrospection has exploited or appropriated established historiographical forms for its own purposes and needs; if certain forms persist or recur from one generation of homosexual writers to the next, they do so, as we shall see, meaningfully.

Absent histories

Also meaningful are the plots and forms that do *not* recur: pursuing the routes homosexual retrospection has taken, we must continually strive to imagine the paths along which it has been unable or unwilling to venture. One of these phantom paths would take us into the working-class gay past - a path along which the wealthy homosexual coterie of the *fin de siècle*, for example, in search of a prestigious ancestry, would never have

¹³ Catherine Belsey, 'True Love: The Metaphysics of Romance', in *Women: a cultural review*, 3 (2) (Autumn 1992), pp. 181-92.

¹⁴ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Hemel Hempstead, 1991), p. 43.

sent their fantasies (and which, of course, working-class homosexuals of the period were themselves in no position to tread, at least in print). Another would lead us into black history.

The grand narratives of homosexual historiography - though, certainly, frequently appealing to the supposed sexual freedoms of other cultures - have rarely invited black participation or amendment. They have sometimes, however, received it: African-American scholar Alain Locke, for example, confessed to Langston Hughes his "infatuation with Greek ideals of life";¹⁵ Harlem Renaissance musician Undine Moore based a composition upon one of the lyrics of Sappho.¹⁶ Their work might be read as a complement to white historical fantasy, or a radical revision of it - a reassertion of the black roots of classical cultures which, as Martin Bernal has demonstrated, British Hellenists rigorously suppressed;¹⁷ Locke, at least, was evidently ultimately more interested in replacing the Greek model with an *African* myth of homoerotic origins.¹⁸

Protesting or otherwise, however, black interventions in homosexual historiography have been occasional, and sometimes ambiguous, ones; it has only been in recent years - when white lesbians and gays, too, have attempted to look beneath or beyond the homosexual grand narratives - that black writers have organised together to challenge white paradigms and to trace their own distinct homosexual histories. In the same year in which Gloria Hull protested that "Black women poets are not 'Shakespeare's sisters'",¹⁹ Ann Allen Shockley's short story 'A Meeting of the Sapphic Daughters' (1979) suggested the white feminist Sappho's inappropriateness as a model for the modern black lesbian.²⁰ With their debunking emphasis upon *sisters* and *daughters*, both Hull

¹⁵ Quoted by David Bergman, 'The African and the pagan in gay Black literature', in Joseph Bristow (ed.), *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing* (London and New York, 1992), pp. 148-69, p. 160.

¹⁶ Moore's piece is referred to in Ora Williams, Thelma Williams, Dora Wilson and Ramona Matthewson's 'American Black Women Composers: A Selected Annotated Bibliography', in Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith (eds.), *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* (New York, 1982), pp. 297-306, p. 304.

¹⁷ Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: the Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Vol. 1: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985* (London, 1987).

¹⁸ See Bergman, 'The African and the pagan in gay Black literature'.

¹⁹ Gloria T. Hull, 'Afro-American Women Poets: A Bio-Critical Survey', in Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (eds.), *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets* (Bloomington, 1979), pp. 165-82, p. 165.

²⁰ Ann Allen Shockley, 'A Meeting of the Sapphic Daughters', in *The Black and White of It* (Tallahassee, 1987). First published in *Sinister Wisdom*, Spring 1979.

and Shockley were implicitly attacking the familial pretensions of lesbian/feminist rhetoric; though black and white lesbians have occasionally taken the same matrilinear paths in their search for historical precedent - SDiane Bogus, for example, follows Judy Grahn in tracing a 'bulldagger' tradition back to the Celtic warrior Queen Boudica²¹ - they have more often arrived at distinct and mutually exclusive Great Mothers: "YOUR GODDESS DOES NOT REMEMBER RACISM," Kit Yee Chan rebukes a white feminist 'witch', "KNOWS HOW TO APPROPRIATE, HAS A SWISS BANK ACCOUNT!!!".²² More empowering black lesbian models have been figures such as the female warriors of Dahomey, and the 'zamis' - the women-loving women of the Caribbean island of Carriacou - both memorably invoked by Audre Lorde in poetry and prose.²³ Indeed, the very favouring of the term 'zami' over 'lesbian' in some black women's writing secures for the modern black same-sex lover an entirely different cultural history to that enjoyed, by implication, by the white sapphist.

Different in content, black and white lesbian and gay histories have, correspondingly, been different in form: while the historical novel genre has allowed white writers to explore precisely those points at which homosexual and more traditional histories intersect, it has also rendered irrecoverable those pasts for which historiography has no model. Black historical fiction is a relatively new genre: as Barbara Christian points out, for all post-colonial writers - but especially, perhaps, for African Americans - history has never been a place in which to wander with ease. She quotes Sherley Anne Williams, author of the 1986 *Dessa Rose*, set in the days of American slavery: "I loved history as a child, until some clear-eyed young Negro pointed out, quite rightly, that there was no place in the American past I could go and be free".²⁴ African-American writers (for example, Williams herself, and Toni Morrison in *Beloved* [1987]) have only recently begun to use fiction to examine those painful areas of their history previously skirted or

²¹ SDiane A. Bogus, 'The "Queen B" Figure in Black Literature', in Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow (eds.), *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions* (New York, 1990), pp. 275-90, p. 275.

²² Kit Yee Chan, 'Strategy Journal Excerpts', in Makeda Silvera (ed.), *Piece of My Heart: a Lesbian of Colour Anthology* (Toronto, 1992), pp. 361-4, p. 363.

²³ See, for example, 'Dahomey' and '125th Street and Abomey', in Lorde's *The Black Unicorn* (1978); and her *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982).

²⁴ Barbara Christian, '"Somebody Forgot to Tell Somebody Something": African-American Women's Historical Novels', in Joanne M. Braxton and Andrée Nicola McLaughlin (eds.), *Wild Women in the Whirlwind: Afro-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance* (London, 1990), pp. 326-41, p. 329.

even suppressed by a self-protective black culture.²⁵

These traumas and lacunae have determined the shape of black lesbian and gay history, too. While some commentators understand colonialism and slavery to have imposed patriarchal and heterosexual structures upon black cultures,²⁶ and others - Susan Beaver, for example, and Paula Gunn Allen, Gloria Anzaldúa and Will Roscoe - find a spiritual and cultural ancestry for modern homosexuality in the histories and mythologies of the native cultures of North and South America,²⁷ many have found it hard to locate a homosexual tradition before enslavement; their work may gesture towards a spiritual affinity with African or Asian originals, but more often seeks to recuperate the distinctive black cultures of the diaspora.²⁸ While, as we shall see later, the nineteenth century has in recent years been perceived as a milestone of modern gay history, inspiring historians and novelists alike, the key moments of black gay retrospection are twentieth-century ones - the '20s and '30s,²⁹ the war and post-war years.³⁰ "As black gay men we have *always* existed in the African-American community", asserts Joseph Beam in his Introduction to the black gay anthology *In the Life* (1986), identifying an implicitly urban and modern cultural tradition. "We have been ministers, hairdressers, entertainers, sales clerks, civil rights activists, teachers, playwrights, trash collectors, dancers, government officials,

²⁵ Jane Campbell, in *Mythic Black Fiction: The Transformation of History* (Knoxville, 1986), examines black historical novels since 1853 - but as she points out, few of these novels are 'historical' in the traditional sense: the roots of the black historical novel proper reach back only through two or three decades, to the work of Ellison and Haley.

²⁶ See, for example, Makeda Silvera, 'Man Royals and Sodomites: Some Thoughts on the Invisibility of Afro-Caribbean Lesbians', in Silvera (ed.), *Piece of My Heart*, pp. 14-26, and Max C. Smith, 'By the Year 2000', in Joseph Beam (ed.), *In the Life: a Black Gay Anthology* (Boston, 1986), pp. 224-29.

²⁷ Susan Beaver, 'Gays and Lesbians of the First Nations', in Silvera, *Piece of My Heart*, pp. 197-8. Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1986). Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (San Francisco, 1987). Will Roscoe, *The Zuni Man-Woman* (1991).

²⁸ For a rare and interesting black lesbian fiction set in the slave-owning South itself, however, see Ann Allen Shockley's 'The Mistress and the Slave Girl' (in *The Black and White of It*), in which a white female plantation-owner buys and seduces a beautiful mixed-race slave.

²⁹ See, for example, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (London, 1983), Isaac Julien's film *Looking for Langston* (1988), and the range of gay studies of the Harlem Renaissance, including Gloria T. Hull's '"Lines She Did Not Dare": Angelica Weld Grimké, Harlem Renaissance Poet', in Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale and David M. Halperin (eds.), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (New York and London, 1993), pp. 453-66, and Charles Michael Smith's 'Bruce Nugent: Bohemian of the Harlem Renaissance', in Beam, *In the Life*, pp. 209-20.

³⁰ For example, Lorde, *Zami*; Jewelle Gomez, 'Don't Explain', in Irene Zahava's *Lesbian Love Stories* (Freedom Ca., 1989); Samuel R. Delany, *The Motion of Light in Water: Sex and Science Fiction Writing in the East Village, 1957-1965* (New York, 1988); Cherry Muhanji, *Her* (San Francisco, 1990); and Cheryl Clarke, 'Of Althea and Flaxie', *Narratives: poems in the tradition of black women* (New York, 1983).

choir masters, and dish-washers."³¹

In this thesis, which is interested primarily in the ways in which writers have found meaningful homosexual models in settings which pre-date the emergence of modern homosexual identities, the presence of black authors will be noticeably small; equally striking will be the absence of black protagonists from the histories under discussion. Having allowed the thesis to be shaped by the material it examines, I intend all its lacunae to be eloquent ones - testaments to the cultural factors determining literary production over the past century, which have offered women and men, white writers and black, very different access to crucial educational and creative resources. Though, similarly, the study as a whole celebrates the ingenuity and bravado with which lesbian and gay authors have challenged historiographical privilege and partiality with their own subversive histories, I have resisted succumbing to the lure of those histories uncritically. Inspiring all of the writers I shall be considering was a sense of the *provisionality* of historical representation; as we shall see, however, most were blind to, or untroubled by, the suppressions and exclusions of their own, alternative, versions.

³¹ Joseph Beam, *In the Life*, p. 16.

CHAPTER 1

History and Homosexual Definition

Without doubt, the single most important historical reference-point in self-identified homosexual writing of the modern period has been ancient Greece. As James Saslow's *Ganymede in the Renaissance* shows, since the fifteenth century at least artists have looked to Greek myth for subjects with which homoerotically to 'code' their work.¹ Early homosexual apologia invoking the Greco-Roman model included Thomas Canon's lost eighteenth-century *Ancient and Modern Pederasty Investigated and Exemplified*, Jeremy Bentham's 1785 essay on 'paederasty', Friedrich Wilhelm von Ramdohr's *Venus Urania* (1798), and Heinrich Hössli's championing tract on "Männerliebe", *Eros*, of 1836.² German commentators, in particular - most notably, Johann Winckelmann - directed attention to classical paiderastia throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.³ With the emergence of a homosexual rights campaign and literature in the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the pursuit of a classical erotic model intensified. Sensitive to the obvious androcentrism of Hellenic society - to what Eve Sedgwick understands to be the 'seamless continuum' between its homosexual and homosocial

¹ James M. Saslow, *Ganymede in the Renaissance: Homosexuality in Art and Society* (New Haven and London, 1986).

² Randolph Trumbach notes Canon's volume in 'London's Sodomites: Homosexual Behaviour and Western Culture in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of Social History*, 11 (1977), pp. 1-33, p. 14. For more on Bentham's essay, see Louis Crompton, *Byron and Greek Love: Homophobia in 19th-Century England* (London, 1985), chapter 1. Hubert Kennedy cites Friedrich Wilhelm Basilius von Ramdohr's *Venus Urania; über die Natur der Liebe* and Heinrich Hössli's *Eros; über die Männerliebe* in his *Ulrichs: The Life and Works of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Pioneer of the Modern Gay Movement* (Boston, 1988). Ulrichs was familiar with both works.

³ See the chapter on 'Winckelmann and Platen' in Robert Aldrich's *The Seduction of the Mediterranean: Writing, Art and Homosexual Fantasy* (London and New York, 1993).

interests⁴ - Victorian commentators developed 'Greek Love', a potent, versatile trope around which a range of same-sex identifications could be rallied.

What made classical literature and art so particularly appealing in the late nineteenth century was the evidence they offered of a radically alternative social system, in which the proper spheres of the homosexual lover - the palaestra, the debating-ground and the battlefield - were precisely those denied him by modern criminological and sexological discourse. In a period in which men-loving men were being reconstructed as deviant biological *types*, the Greek cultural system which appeared not just to tolerate, but to celebrate and actively to promote same-sex relations acted as a magnet for homosexual speculation in a variety of forms. The military and political comrades honoured in Greece - Achilles and Patroclus, Harmodius and Aristogeiton - were frequently also lovers. Greek myth celebrated the mignons of gods and heroes - Hyacinth, Hylas, Ganymede - as well as their mistresses; offered moreover a personification of Love itself, the nubile youth Eros - "patron of paiderastia", in John Addington Symonds' words⁵ - which seemed framed for homophile appropriation. Greek statuary, in which the idealised forms of these and other male subjects were so unblushingly displayed, seemed, similarly, to invite homoerotic speculation. Symonds himself, as a boy, had become infatuated with the statue of the Praxitelean Cupid (the 'Genius of the Vatican', which was to retain its erotic attraction for him in later life) - to the concern of his father, who recommended a more appropriate icon, "a nymph or Hebe".⁶ The young Karl Ulrichs had become similarly preoccupied with "the nude figure of a Greek god or hero";⁷ Edward Carpenter, recalling a youthful visit to Italy, felt he had absorbed from Greek sculpture "a germinative influence on my mind, [...] the seed of new conceptions of life".⁸

To the sensitive modern observer the candid male bodies of Greek art operated as metonyms for a culture in which the *fact* of homosexual desire appeared to be intergrated into a more general model of responsible citizenship: for Thebes and Sparta, for example,

⁴ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, (New York, 1985), p. 4.

⁵ John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (London, 1901), p. 40.

⁶ *The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds*, ed. Phyllis Grosskurth (London, 1984), p. 78.

⁷ Kennedy, *Ulrichs*, p. 17.

⁸ Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams: Being Autobiographical Notes* (London, 1916), p. 67.

with their sacred bands of warrior-lovers; for classical Athens, with its ritualised *paiderastia*, in which an older *erastes* passed on to his youthful charge, or *eromenos*, the values and privileges of the Athenian patriarchy. As we shall see, this latter institution held a particular appeal for the upper-middle class, frequently paedophile, Victorian and Edwardian homosexual subcultures. The paiderastic model provided modern homosexuals with a resource with which to challenge the authority of sexological and criminological definitions; but, with its emphasis upon sexual continence and moral accountability, it also allowed them to work *within* those definitions, and argue for medical and legal tolerance. Homosexuals valued Plato's early dialogues, for example, because, though like modern sexological studies they appear to debate the cause and nature of homosexuality, they address the phenomenon not as a psychological, biological or social 'problem', but as an ethical or philosophical one - the approach adopted by Symonds, of course, in his own two *Problems* (*A Problem in Greek Ethics* [1883] and *A Problem in Modern Ethics* [1891]). Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium* constructs a prestigious homosexual myth of origins. Pausanias', which rejects base or earthly love in favour of the spiritual or heavenly ('Uranian') love of boys, provided Ulrichs and subsequent generations of same-sex lovers with an affirmative homosexual vocabulary. Socrates', which prioritises the paiderastic lover's intellectual contribution to society over the heterosexual's more mundane procreative effort, proposes an alternative model of progeniture to that endorsed by modern sexology, for whom the homosexual could only figure as tragically afamilial, or even menacingly *anti*-familial.

These models proved to be immensely attractive to turn-of-the-century homosexual writers; Aristophanes' myth forms the master narrative to Frederick Rolfe's aptly-titled *The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole* (1909), for example.⁹ The Socratic paradigm, in

⁹ Aristophanes recounts the myth in which all human beings are descended from round, eight-limbed creatures - male, female and hermaphrodite. These creatures, when divided into two by Zeus, are set on a quest to regain their other halves - a quest which we, their descendants, continue to re-enact in our search for male or female partners. This myth seems a perfect allegory of heterosexual and homosexual desire, and has been interpreted as such by recent, as well as Victorian, homosexual apologists - for example John Boswell, in his 'Revolutions, Universals and Sexual Categories' (reproduced in Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey, Jr. [eds.], *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Lesbian and Gay Past*, [New York, 1989], pp. 17-36). David Halperin, however, suggests that Aristophanes' sexual taxonomies are more complex, and less commensurable with modern sexual categories, than commentators have supposed: see the title essay of his *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York and London, 1990), pp. 15-40.

particular, recurs as a touchstone of early gay writing. It forms, implicitly, the basis of Carpenter's argument in *Homogenic Love* (1894) regarding the "special function" of the intermediate or homogenic type "in the generation - not of bodily children - but of those children of the mind, the philosophical conceptions and ideals which transform our lives and those of society";¹⁰ it informs Wilde's crafty reinterpretation in the extended *The Portrait of Mr W.H.* (1893) of those sonnets in which Shakespeare seems to be urging his addressee to marry and father children. "The marriage Shakespeare proposes for Willie Hughes is the 'marriage with his Muse'," he explains. "The children he begs him to beget are no children of flesh and blood, but more immortal children of undying fame".¹¹ With the emergence in the 1880s of New Women, birth control movements, celibacy movements and eugenics, procreation was, in this period, a fiercely contested issue. As we shall see in chapter 2, celebration of what Lord Alfred Douglas termed the "sweet unfruitful love" partly mobilised, partly drastically challenged, turn-of-the-century preoccupations with national and racial degeneration.

To anxious homosexuals like the young Symonds, whose unspeakable desires alienated him from his own, deeply homophobic, culture, the first encounter with unexpurgated Greek literature was epiphanic:

Here in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* [...] I discovered the true *liber amoris* at last, the revelation I had been waiting for, the consecration of a long-cherished idealism. It was just as though the voice of my own soul spoke to me through Plato, as though in some antenatal experience I had lived the life of philosophical Greek lover.

Harrow vanished into unreality. I had touched solid ground. I had obtained the sanction of the love which had been ruling me from childhood. Here was the poetry, the philosophy of my own enthusiasm for male beauty, expressed with all the magic of unrivalled style. And, what was more, I became aware that the Greek race - the actual historical Greeks of antiquity - treated this love seriously, invested it with moral charm, endowed it with sublimity.¹²

Greek literature seemed to *explain* Symonds to himself; he understood the modern homosexual to be not, as millenarian writers like Carpenter presented him, *ahead* of his time, but tragically estranged from it: "I was born out of sympathy with the men around

¹⁰ Edward Carpenter, *Homogenic Love* (Manchester, 1894), pp. 42-3.

¹¹ Oscar Wilde, *The Portrait of Mr W.H.* [*The Greatly Enlarged Version Prepared by the Author After the Appearance of the Story in 1889 but not Published*], ed. Vyvyan Holland (London, 1958), pp. 28-9. Further references will be included in the text.

¹² Symonds, *Memoirs*, p. 99. Further page references, where obvious, will be included in the text.

me," he wrote in his *Memoirs* in the 1890s, "and have lived a stifled anachronism" (218). His mood, however, was one which many homosexual writers of the period shared; as it did for him, ancient Greece figured for them as the culture to which their proscribed modern passions properly belonged: "Then do I find my own", wrote Arthur Lyon Raile (Edward Warren) in his significantly titled 'Home' of 1909, "then gather it/ from lineaments effaced/ that lurk in parchment of a Grecian writ".¹³ Such texts, in which the isolated poet attempts an imperfect replication of a faded original, are implicitly elegiac; crucially, however, lament for what Symonds understood to be the "lost fatherland" of ancient Greece was precisely a sentiment around which the homosexual subculture could rally.¹⁴ Many authors used in their work (*Itamos*, *Ionica*) or even took for themselves ('Philebus') real or imaginary Greek names with which they signalled their homoerotic interests.¹⁵ Others, like Lord Alfred Douglas, issued audacious challenges to modern mores; he begins his long 'Hymn to Physical Beauty' (1896), for example, by asking, "Sweet Spirit of the body, archetype/ Of lovely mortal shapes, where is thy shrine?", only to conclude that "Spurned in the dust uranian passion lies":

Dull fools decree the sweet unfruitful love,
In Hellas counted more than half divine,
Less than half human now;
[...] they who worshipped thee,
Thy gods, are dead; once were thy temples full
Of gifts; thou hadst more images than He
Who died for men.¹⁶

The centrality of the Greek Love trope in nineteenth- and turn-of-the-century homosexual writing has, not surprisingly, attracted the attention of literary and cultural historians. Jeffrey Meyers, in his 1977 *Homosexuality and Literature 1890-1930*, understands the appeal to the past in terms of *retreat* and *disguise*. "The fear of social condemnation and judicial punishment", he writes, "forced homosexuals to assume a

¹³ Arthur Lyon Raile [pseud. Edward Warren], *The Wild Rose* (London and New York, 1909), p. 142.

¹⁴ John Addington Symonds, 'The Genius of Greek Art', in *Studies of the Greek Poets* (London, 1873), footnote to p. 422.

¹⁵ Raile [i.e. Warren], *Itamos: A Volume of Poems* (London, 1903); William Johnson [later Cory], *Ionica* (London, 1858). 'Philebus' (the name of one of the Platonic dialogues) was the pseudonym of poet John Leslie Barford, who produced a number of 'Uranian' volumes in the 1910s and '20s, including *Ladslove Lyrics* (1918) and *Young Things* (1921).

¹⁶ Lord Alfred Douglas, *Poèmes* (Paris, 1896), pp. 2-6.

protective posture in life and to devise a strategy of art that would allow them to express their private feelings in a public genre"; they "desperately and defensively cite the moral examples and aesthetic principles of ancient Israel and classical Greece to justify, rationalize or condone the validity of their personal obsessions."¹⁷ Similarly Richard Jenkyns, significantly discussing homosexual Hellenism in the 'Change and Decay' chapter of his *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (1980), feels that "the Hellenic tone was employed [by homosexual writers] to becloud emotions whose nature would otherwise be too glaringly plain". He laments the colonisation of the classical model by literary "nonentities", the "procession of dim anxious figures who flit like shadows through the underworld of Victorian culture". In the work of these "shabby and insignificant" writers, he argues, Hellenism was reduced: "no longer a great deep mine in which men could dig eagerly for unguessed riches" but "a screen to hide behind, or at best the title of a sect".¹⁸

Since the appearance of these studies, lesbian and gay critics have offered more generous readings of homosexual Hellenism - though often in brief and blanket forms which elide its range and complexity.¹⁹ One of the more thoughtful and stimulating analysts of Greek Love has been Linda Dowling: she draws attention to the specifically homosexual resonance of words such as 'Dorian' and '*poikilos*', which emerged within Greek studies at Oxford and Cambridge and operated precisely in the overlap of proscribed and dominant groups. Such terms, she claims, "do not define a specific quality or issue so much as simply locate and expose a ganglion of psycho-sexual and psycho-cultural anxieties" - they codify homosexual interests, in other words, in negotiation with established discourses, but offer nothing so simple as a homosexual 'code' operating 'beneath' or in opposition to them. It is precisely "the varying adhesions and resistances that punctuate the relation between 'homosexual' and dominant discourses", she claims,

¹⁷ Jeffrey Meyers, *Homosexuality and Literature 1890-1930* (London and Atlantic Highlands, 1987), p. 10.

¹⁸ Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 292-3. Further page references to Jenkyns, where obvious, will be included in the text.

¹⁹ The essays by Joseph Bristow, Chris White and John Fletcher in Joseph Bristow (ed.), *Sexual Sameness* (London and New York, 1992) all touch on homosexual Hellenism. Fletcher's article, on *Maurice*, is in part a response to Robert K. Martin's analysis of the Hellenism of Forster's novel, 'Edward Carpenter and the Double Structure of *Maurice*', to be found in Stuart Kellogg(ed.), *Literary Visions of Homosexuality* (New York, 1983), pp. 35-46. Also pertinent in that collection is Byrne S. Fone's essay, 'This Other Eden: Arcadia and the Homosexual Imagination', pp. 13-34.

that studies of Victorian sexuality "must strive to [...] plot".²⁰

It is just such a 'plotting' that I intend to carry out here, endorsing Dowling's perspective but significantly, I hope, expanding it. By drawing on the work of a range of writers, including Wilde, Symonds and Carpenter, Charles Kains Jackson and E. E. Bradford, I aim to suggest both the extent of the preoccupation with Greek Love, and the variety of erotic and cultural transgressions ancient Greece was employed to authorise. I seek also to contextualise Greek Love, which constitutes only the most elaborate of homosexual retrospection's many tropes: the purpose of this and the following chapter is to resituate homosexual Hellenism alongside the turn-of-the-century homosexual historiography, historical fiction-making and utopian speculation from which, to its deployers, it was rarely totally distinct. Homosexual historical narratives - including Hellenist ones - emerged as a response to the, often intimately connected, processes of definition and prohibition with which this period was fraught; but this does not mean, as Meyers and Richards seem to assume, that homosexual historiography was somehow at the mercy of dominant discourses, bound within their normalising parameters. On the contrary; I shall be suggesting, ultimately, that the appeal to ancient Greece resulted in the construction of a distinct historical or more specifically *paiderastic* discourse with quite radical implications for homosexual self-definition. Paderastic discourse existed in a continual state of negotiation with other, apparently more dominant discourses, sometimes exploiting them, often - as we shall see - challenging them.

'The Princes of Old Time'

The homosexual appeal to ancient Greece overlapped most substantially with two main discourses: orthodox Victorian Hellenism, and sexology. These were not, of course, monolithic institutions (it is more appropriate to talk of *Hellenisms* and *sexologies*); in the construction of both, moreover, homosexuals had already played a substantial role. Ulrichs had pioneered a somatic model of homosexual desire in the 1860s, and was emulated by commentators like Symonds, Carpenter and, especially, Hirschfeld;

²⁰ Linda Dowling, 'Ruskin's Pied Beauty and the Constitution of a "Homosexual" Code', in *The Victorian Newsletter*, 75 (Spring 1989), pp. 1-8, p. 7.

Winckelmann - "the man who invented ancient Greece as an object of idolization"²¹ - had set the parameters of Hellenist debate in the eighteenth century, and was himself championed by the influential aesthete Walter Pater in the nineteenth. But, as we shall see, the historical perspective allowed homosexual writers to critique sexological conclusions even as they invoked them; and the candid elegizing of writers like Douglas and Raile clearly revised the selective Hellenism of the Victorians from which it took its cue.²²

As Richard Jenkyns' study reveals, Hellas' considerable Victorian appeal lay in its very amenability to modern reconstruction. Ancient Greece had an endless contemporary pertinence that was ensured by its very *absence* - the, often literally, fragmented nature of its remains; its distance, both temporal and spatial, from the British present. Greece occupied moreover an ambiguous place - at the border of occident and orient - in the European self-image. Its role as the site of homosexual fantasy was, of course, linked to its exotic status in British imperial ideology; the *psychic* bond homosexual men experienced with ancient Greece related to the sexual freedoms they enjoyed in it and other southern European countries. Robert Aldrich, in *The Seduction of the Mediterranean*, identifies a recurrent motif in homosexual experience of the past two centuries in which "the Northern man [is] drawn to (homosexual) romance, companionship or sex in the South". This, he argues, "is a paradigm of homosexual desire and a clear itinerary in European gay history".²³ The kind of linking of the homosexual interest in ancient Greece with other forms of retrospection that I am attempting in this thesis is beyond the limits of Aldrich's project; his study is useful precisely because it provides us with an overview of the way in which the, often scholarly, homosexual interest in Hellas overlapped with a more frankly sensual philhellenism.²⁴ He draws attention, for example, to the work of photographers like von

²¹ Richard Jenkyns, *Dignity and Decadence: Victorian Art and the Classical Inheritance* (London, 1991), p. 87.

²² Thomas Lewis describes how the homosexual element was expunged from the Greek myths, for example, by certain eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British commentators. See his 'The Brothers of Ganymede', in *Salmagundi*, 58-59 (Fall 1982-Winter 1983), pp. 147-65. See also Frank M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven and London, 1981), pp. 424-6.

²³ Robert Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean*, p. 4.

²⁴ I am using these terms in the sense authorised by Richard Jenkyns: "philhellenism being the love of modern Greece and its people as distinct from Hellenism, which is an interest in the ancient Greeks": *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*, p. 3.

Gloeden and von Plüschow, whose images of classically-posed Mediterranean youths were popular over the turn of the century amongst aesthetes in general and homosexuals in particular; Symonds, for example, included von Plüschow's studies in his correspondence from Europe with Kains Jackson, and recommended the photographer to Charles Sayle and Edward Carpenter.²⁵

The selective Hellenist re-readings of homosexual artists and writers both exploited Greece's already over-determined status and attempted to redress it - recovered the culture's homoerotic mores from heterosexual misrepresentation, and reconstructed them along modern lines. Marc André Raffalovich's 1886 'Ganymede of Ida', for example, presents the stalwart Greek heroes as tragic decadent icons:

Death, lamentation, music, flowers and song,
 Worship and scent and much idolatry,
 Incense that burns all day and all night long:
 For those the world's desire - but not for thee.
 Thy perfect limbs we praise, but not with sighs:
 On thy Hellenic brows, O tearless lad,
 Unaltered oleanders Grecian-wise,
 Serene and faultless and forever glad.
 But ah! for Syrian Adonis slain
 Blood-red anemones we twine indeed;
 And hyacinths narcissus-like mean pain.
 Such flowers should never fade for Ganymede,
 But where the ancient waters close and smile,
 For Hylas and the Darling of the Nile.²⁶

Like Wilde's and Symonds' decadent writing (which attempts, if not to dispense with verbs altogether, then, as Ian Fletcher and Malcolm Bradbury note, to employ "deliberately weak ones"²⁷) Raffalovich's sonnet is a lattice of suggestive signifiers in which meaning is implicit rather than overt - but obvious enough to the sensitive reader. Ganymede was Zeus' heavenly cup-bearer, Adonis the paradigmatically handsome hero from whose spilt blood anemones sprang. Hyacinth was loved by Apollo and accidentally slain by him,

²⁵ Aldrich, *Seduction*; see Chapter 5, 'Mediterranean Men in Art and Photography'. For Symonds' enthusiasm for von Plüschow, see his letters to Kains Jackson (p. 645), Sayle (p. 676) and Carpenter (pp. 814-5) in Herbert M. Schueller and Robert L. Peters (eds.) *The Letters of John Addington Symonds, Volume III: 1885-1893* (Detroit, 1969).

²⁶ Marc André Raffalovich, *In Fancy Dress* (London, 1886), p. 95.

²⁷ Fletcher and Bradbury, Preface to Ian Fletcher (ed.), *Decadence and the 1890s* (London, 1979), p. 12.

while Narcissus, of course, preferred the contemplation of the male form (his own) to the attentions of nymphs. Hylas, the companion of Hercules, was drowned by water-nymphs; Antinous, Hadrian's favourite, drowned himself in Egypt.

This small but suggestive gallery of classical heroes - the "Princes of Old Time", as an anonymous poet of 1892 dubbed them²⁸ - recurs again and again in the homosexual writing of the period. (Antinous, of course, belongs to Roman history; I shall have more to say about his appearance here in chapter 3.) The July and October 1889 issues of that notoriously 'aesthetic' journal *The Artist*, for example, offering its readers a variety of classical 'Subjects for Pictures', bring together familiar and not so familiar homosexual icons and real and mythological Greek heroes - Hyacinth and Apollo, Narcissus, Iolas [sic] (the "youthful favourite of Hercules"), Alectryon (Mars' "boy-friend"), Diocles ("the Athenian [...] who died in the defence of a certain youth whom he loved") - and point out the special attractions of each subject. Euphemus, the Argonaut: an "opportunity for delineation of form with play of light on flesh from sun-filled blue of sky above, to sun-lit blue of sea beneath"; Plato and Agathon: the "broad-shouldered, stalwart frame of the poet-philosopher would make a natural and effective study in contrast with the figure of a slight and graceful youth".²⁹ These lists invite *speculation*: imaginary speculation of male bodies, and speculation *about* the relationship between them. They are catalogues in more ways than one: Baedekers for the grand tour of the newly-charted homophile territory; portfolios - like those available in the studios of von Gloeden and von Plüschow - from which the interested observer could select his nubile icon. Wilde, typically, exposed the homosexual resonances of such iconography even as he exploited them: "I had drawn you as Paris in dainty armour," Basil Hallward, confessing his love, reminds Dorian Gray, "and as Adonis with huntsman's cloak and polished boar-spear. Crowned with heavy lotus-blossoms you had sat on the prow of Adrian's barge, gazing across the green turbid Nile. You had leant over the still pool of some Greek woodland, and seen in the water's silent silver the marvel of your own face".³⁰

"Dorian" is, of course, a significant patronymic, a name suggestive of the Greek

²⁸ Anonymous, 'Chant Royal: Of the Princes of Old Time', in *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture*, 1 March 1892, p. 69.

²⁹ 'Subjects for Pictures', in *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture*, 1 July 1889, pp. 194-6, and 1 October 1889, pp. 290-2.

³⁰ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Harmondsworth, 1984), pp. 128-9.

'fatherland': "I saw thee where the Doric porches show/ heaven and earth thy fatherland aglow", wrote Arthur Lyon Raile, addressing Eros, in 1902.³¹ Such writers proposed ancient Greece as the *source* of homosexuality; in doing so, they mobilised the more general Victorian theory that Hellas represented the youth of mankind and the birth-place of Western culture.³² "The Greeks had no Past" begins the final, controversial chapter of Symonds' *Studies of the Greek Poets*, in which he argues that any consideration of ancient Greece must address the homoeroticism at the heart of its aesthetic and political system;³³ the Greeks had no past because they figured, precisely, in a modern myth of origins in which they constituted *the* past, a past from which the British imagined they took their political and aesthetic values. The vocal turn-of-the-century homosexual subculture may have had a particular investment in such a myth simply because of its deep foundations in gender and class privilege. Virtually all of the writers I have been discussing - Wilde, Douglas, Symonds, Carpenter - were, of course, Oxbridge-educated men. Charles Kains Jackson - "the pope - or more precisely the ombudsman - of both the London and Oxford groups of homosexuals"³⁴ - maintained close links with the undergraduate magazines *The Spirit Lamp* and *The Chameleon*; they, and more particularly his own journal *The Artist*, provided a forum for homosexual writers in the 1890s.³⁵ Many of these seem to have conceptualised ancient Greece primarily in Oxbridge terms, and vice versa. Gascoigne Mackie's *Charmides; or, 'Oxford Twenty Years Ago'*, for example, (published appropriately enough by the Oxford-based Blackwell, in 1898) conflates two forms of homosexual nostalgia: 'Charmides' is the narrator's partner in a university romance and, like his Grecian namesake, dies, tragically, in the bloom of youth. Though many of the homosexual writers of the period certainly had extensive contact with working men and 'renters', the tradition they attempted to

³¹ Raile, 'Love on the Way', in *Itamos*, p. 101.

³² See Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*, pp. 168-71. For an analysis of the racial implications of the Victorian appropriation of ancient Greece, see Martin Bernal's *Black Athena: the Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Volume 1: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985* (London, 1987).

³³ Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets*, p. 398.

³⁴ Ian Fletcher, 'Decadence and the Little Magazines', in Fletcher, *Decadence and the 1890s*, pp. 173-202, p. 188.

³⁵ See chapter 2 of Timothy d'Arch Smith's, *Love in Earnest: Some Notes on the Lives and Writings of English 'Uranian' Poets from 1889 to 1930* (London, 1970), for details of these publications and the trouble into which they eventually ran.

catalogue, the role models they adopted, had little in common with the 'rough' or 'mary-ann' cultures from which they drew their sexual partners; as we shall see in chapter 2, writers often authorised their erotic speculation of working-class British boys by reconstructing them as Hellenic icons.

With Greece as their ur-culture, other historical eras were valued for the extent to which they supposedly recalled, or provided a link with, the fatherland itself. The Renaissance, in particular, was viewed as a time when Hellenic ideals - in their erotic as well as aesthetic aspect - had been briefly resuscitated. Wilde, in *The Portrait of Mr W.H.*, finds "the soul, as well as the language, of neo-Platonism" in Shakespeare's sonnets. The "spirit of the Renaissance", he claims, "sought to elevate friendship to the high dignity of the antique ideal, to make it a vital factor in the new culture, and a mode of self-conscious intellectual development" (42). Similarly Symonds, who had first been attracted to Michelangelo's poems by the Platonic echoes he located in them, argued for Michelangelo's affiliation with Hellas. "The tap-root of feeling", he wrote of the artist's work, "is Greek".³⁶ Other homosexual texts drew their Hellenic icons from a variety of - sometimes unlikely - historical settings. The anonymous 'On a Picture' of 1892 - published, again, in the *Artist* - was inspired by Santa Croce's 'The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian', but reinterprets the Saint as the modern ambassador for ancient erotic practice:

Stripped we behold thee, beautiful
As youthful pagan gods of yore
Do the old lights dwindle or glow dull?
Nay, but they brighten more and more.³⁷

The nostalgia of poems like this answered intensely contemporary anxieties; Sebastian's martyrdom - and the classical lineage with which he is imagined to transcend it - take on a new significance in the context of modern anti-homosexual proscription. Some writers even sought to recuperate Christ himself as a sympathetic icon. This involved more than simply identifying Jesus - as Xavier Mayne, in *The Intersexes*, did - as "an Uranian".³⁸ It attempted a *synthesis* of Christianity and Hellenism, an appropriation of Jesus for

³⁶ Quoted by Phyllis Grosskurth, *John Addington Symonds: A Biography* (London, 1964), p. 260.

³⁷ *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture*, 1 February 1892, p. 50.

³⁸ Xavier Mayne [pseud. Edward Prime Stevenson], *The Intersexes: A History of Similisexualism As a Problem in Social Life* ([Naples], 1908), p. 259. Further references will be included in the text.

Manly Love in which he was hailed - as by Leonard Green, in *Dream Comrades* (1916) - as "the lover and comrade of all mankind".³⁹ Jenkyns points out that many Victorians regarded the classical world as *anticipating* Christianity; homosexual writers like Wilde, who took comfort in Reading Gaol from the fantasy of a Greek-speaking Christ conversing with Charmides and Socrates, offered Jesus as a link *back* to an earlier, implicitly homophile, culture.⁴⁰

As we've seen, the appeal of such a culture lay in the apparent absence from it of the discourses of vice and aberration - discourses which circumscribed the modern homosexual role even as they helped to form it. For Symonds, for example, who felt he had been born "out of sympathy" with his own culture, Hellenism offered the most suitable - indeed, the only really adequate - way of addressing homosexual desire. The diary he kept in his twenties, in the midst of his passion for the seventeen year-old Norman Moor, is a revealing mixture of English and Greek. "Norman dined with me alone: *χάλλιστατος, ἄδρητος, εἰρωνιχός* [most fair, untamed and deceitful]" he wrote in January 1869; the following month he asks "Why was I born for this - to be perpetually seeking *τῶν παίδων νεογυῖον ἄνθος* ['the fresh flower of boys']?"⁴¹ Here, Greek vocabulary is employed not to disguise unorthodox desires but, on the contrary, to reveal them in their most appropriate form; secrecy and dissimulation belong rather to those writings in which Symonds addresses his homosexuality precisely as a *contemporary* phenomenon: to the many poems - for example, the 'Stella Maris' series from the 1884 *Vagabunduli Libellus*, which records his long-term affair with the Venetian gondolier Angelo Fusato - which he "mutilated" to render fit for publication.⁴² For Symonds, in both his life and his writing, contemporary and historical perspectives constituted distinct homosexual discourses which nevertheless existed in a complex state of interdependence. Perhaps more than that of any other Victorian writer, his work reveals the extent of (in Dowling's words) the "adhesions and resistances" between homosexual Hellenism and sexology.

³⁹ Green, *Dream Comrades and Other Prose Sketches* (Oxford, 1916), p. 7.

⁴⁰ Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*, pp. 158-9.

⁴¹ Symonds, *Memoirs*, pp. 195-6.

⁴² Symonds, *Memoirs*, p. 272.

'Dreams that sting but do not satisfy': the case of John Addington Symonds

As we've seen, Symonds experienced an intense, almost reincarnational bond with ancient Greece, the "lost fatherland" from which he was in permanent exile. "What is left for us modern men?" he wrote in his diary in the 1860s. "We cannot be Greek now. [...] And the Spartan laws of comradeship, the Socratic doctrine of a noble life developed out of boy-love with philosophy, how would these show in the tents of Mrs Grundy?"⁴³ He produced, in consequence, a series of historical poems in which love between men is freely explored and frankly celebrated. These poems revisit the paradigmatic paiderastic scenarios of classical history and myth, or transpose the Greek model to an alternative historical setting. In 'In the Syracusan Stone-Quarries', for example, from his first volume of poetry, *Many Moods* (1878), a defeated Athenian warrior kills himself in order to join his dead comrade in the afterworld: "no second night shall find/ Me living," he tells his beloved, "lingering out my widowed hours,/ A slave, without thy sacred soul to shield!"⁴⁴ Even more explicit is 'The Meeting of David and Jonathan', in the same volume, in which the famous Old Testament comrades meet, fall in love, exchange vows and kiss: "Darling art thou called," Jonathan tells the handsome shepherd boy, "Darling of all men, Darling of the Lord,/ But most my Darling - mine - whose heart is thrall'd,/ Whose soul is even as thy soul!" (155). In the 'Poems on Greek Themes' in *New and Old* (1880) homosexual passion - between 'Hesperus and Hymenæus', for example - is similarly routine; 'Eudiades', the long poem written in the aftermath of Symonds' first meeting with Norman Moor and subsequently only privately published, dramatises a paiderastic romance "[in] illustration of Plato and Aristophanes".⁴⁵

The peculiar sense of alienation which drove Symonds to seek refuge in an ancient zeitgeist, however, was quite commensurate with the particular homosexual identity his own culture was, in the second half of the nineteenth century, making available. His career was, after all, contemporaneous with the development of the seminal theories of

⁴³ Symonds, *Memoirs*, p. 169.

⁴⁴ John Addington Symonds, *Many Moods* (London, 1878), p. 32. Further references will be included in the text.

⁴⁵ John Addington Symonds, 'Eudiades: In illustration of Plato and Aristophanes', reprinted in Brian Reade, *Sexual Heretics: Male Homosexuality in English Literature from 1850-1900* (London, 1970). According to Reade, the poem was first published, privately, in 1878 in *Tales of Ancient Greece, No.1, Eudiades and a Cretan Idyll*. Page references, all of which are to Reade, will be included in the text.

sexology, which identified an essential homo/heterosexual *difference*, and sought recognition of the homosexual minority. Ulrichs' twelve investigations into the 'anima muliebris virili corpore inclusa' appeared between 1864 and 1879, and were already being debated in London - in 1868 - while Symonds was eulogizing Moor;⁴⁶ Karoly Maria Benkert first coined the term "homosexual" in the same year.⁴⁷ The extraordinarily frank memoirs produced by Symonds in the 1890s reveal that, despite the fact that he married and fathered children, he experienced his homosexuality in congenital terms, as an unwelcome but inescapable aspect of his deepest self which marked him out from others - rendered him, as he wrote to Horatio Brown in the early 1890s, "a type of man who has not yet been classified".⁴⁸ His distress over his "abnormal inclinations"⁴⁹ found expression in those poems of his which have a contemporary setting, which construct the homosexual lover as neither glorious nor merely ordinary, but as an outlaw or victim. To the historical narratives of comrade-love, in which men are united in life or triumphantly reunited in the hospitable Greek afterlife, they form a striking and revealing contrast.

In the personalised lyrics which alternate with the paiderastic poems of *Many Moods*, for example, the speaker tells of male friends from whom he has been separated, of alluring visions which visit him at night but disappear with the dawn, and of homosexual idylls from which he is eternally excluded. *New and Old* ends on the grim 'The Valley of Vain Desires', which evokes an apocalyptic landscape of homosexual desire and shame: a "chasm, embedded, deep and drear" from which foul "exhalations" emanate, where desperate men seek to slake their "horrible, unquenchable desire" on "gangrened fruit".⁵⁰ The long sequence of poems collectively entitled 'L'Amour de l'Impossible' in *Animi Figura* (1882) similarly speaks of the anguish of urgent but unfulfillable desires: of "tyrannous appetites", of the "slow fire shrouded in a veil of shame" which "Corrodes [one's] very substance, marrow and flesh", and of "dreams that sting but do not satisfy".⁵¹ Symonds clearly found the utopian historical vision

⁴⁶ Kennedy, *Ulrichs*, p. 135. According to Kennedy, Ulrichs' theories were discussed, in early 1868, by the Anthropological Society.

⁴⁷ In a private letter to Ulrichs, dated 6 May 1868, Benkert (aka Kertbeny) seems to have used both "homosexual" and "heterosexual" - terms that would only be employed publicly in 1869 (by Benkert himself) and 1880 (by Gustav Jäger), respectively. See Kennedy, *Ulrichs*, pp. 152-3.

⁴⁸ Symonds, *Memoirs*, p. 289.

⁴⁹ Symonds, *Memoirs*, p. 189.

⁵⁰ John Addington Symonds, *New and Old: A Volume of Verse* (London, 1880), pp. 231-3.

⁵¹ John Addington Symonds, *Animi Figura* (London, 1882), pp. 42-6.

impossible to sustain. In 'Eudiades', for example, exactly at the moment when its Greek lovers have "vowed unspoken vows and blent/ Their throbbing souls in love's accomplishment" (119), Symonds interrupts his own narrative in anguish:

Ah me! words fail. I bow my head and seem
To be but singing in a golden dream.
I cannot bring again the days of Greece,
Or raise to life beloved Eudiades:
I cannot make superb Melanthius grow
In glory of orb'd manhood here, or glow
Before your aching eyes; or teach you how
No shame or fear obscured his lucid brow,
No sin was in his soul, no dull distress
Marred the calm sunlight of his comeliness:
But in his breast sat awful sense of good,
And his strong heart was armed with hardihood
To do and dare all things that might not shame
The boy he loved or taint his own proud name.

Do ye believe - dull generations, dead
In the cold mire of ignorance and dread -
Do ye believe the pure and lofty love
That stirred these children of the seed of Jove?
Oh! that in fact and deed I might rebuild
Those spacious shrines, now marred, I can but gild -
Bruised statues, ruined walls, fast fading forms,
Blurred with dank mists and soaked with ceaseless storms!
In vain. I faint. (120)

At the intrusion of contemporary discourses which would posit the male lover as 'sinful', 'shameful' and 'tainted', the historical narrative breaks down - as, indeed, does the narrator himself. We are reminded that Symonds, under pressure in his own life to sustain the contradictory roles of husband, father, gentleman and homosexual lover, was plagued by periods of debility, depression and ill health. The poem goes on to return us to its pederastic lovers, who remain united in adulthood and, like the comrades of 'In the Syracusan Stone-Quarries', find eternal union in voluntary death. Their example, with a "radiance years can never wholly blight", offers their nineteenth-century eulogizer a tenuous consolation against the "dimness of descending night" (130) in which he finds himself enveloped.

But if 'Eudiades' enacts the weakening of Symonds' historical discourse in its conflict with a contemporary one, then *Sexual Inversion* (1897), upon which Symonds collaborated with Havelock Ellis in the last years of his life, reflects, perhaps, its ultimate

defeat. We shall never know the full extent of Symonds' contribution to *Sexual Inversion*; he certainly provided a number of the case studies - which included ('Case XVIII') his own - and a treatise on paiderastia, *A Problem in Greek Ethics*, which was attached to the first volume as a lengthy appendix. Inspired by the celebration of manly love he had found in the 'Calamus' section of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, Symonds had produced the first draft of this essay in the same period as 'Eudiades', completed it in 1873, and had it privately published, in an edition of only ten copies for circulation amongst friends, ten years later.⁵² The text, as we shall see, was scholarly, but its subject-matter was clearly provocative. Symonds had incorporated part of it into the candid final chapter of his *Studies of the Greek Poets* (1873), the book based upon the lectures he gave to the Sixth Form boys of Clifton College, of whom Moor was one; there, as if to warn Symonds that the stimulating intersections between his homosexual life and his career as a classicist were also sometimes hazardous, it had sparked off a controversy which contributed to his failure to attain an Oxford professorship.⁵³

A Problem in Greek Ethics has a clear homosexual agenda which, when the essay was thrust into the sexological debates of the 1890s (at which point Symonds added a preface to the essay bringing it to the attention specifically of the "student of sexual inversion"⁵⁴), made it an obvious complement to Ellis' liberal arguments for legal and medical tolerance. Traditional accounts of ancient Greece and Rome, when they did not elide homosexuality altogether, stressed the debauched nature of classical erotic practice; as Montgomery Hyde points out, Symonds' championing of Greek Love in *Studies of the Greek Poets* "was in a sense a reply to the conventional Victorian view put forward ten years earlier by the historian W. E. H. Lecky in his *History of European Morals*": Lecky describes Greek homosexuality as "the lowest abyss of unnatural love", and adds that "my task in describing this aspect of Greek life has been an eminently unpleasant one".⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Symonds' celebration of Greek Love is not a simple inversion of the Lecky

⁵² For details of the composition of *A Problem in Greek Ethics* see chapters 11 and 12 of Symonds' *Memoirs*.

⁵³ Grosskurth, *John Addington Symonds*, pp. 168-73.

⁵⁴ John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics*, p. 1. I am quoting from the 1901 edition, which reproduced the essay in its *Sexual Inversion* form, but translated most of the Greek terms left untranslated in that version. Further page references, where obvious, will be included in the text.

⁵⁵ H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Other Love: An Historical and Contemporary Survey of Homosexuality in Britain* (London, 1970), p. 101. The quotations from Lecky are Hyde's.

stance: what he foregrounds in the *Problem* is not the absence of sexual prohibition but the *restraint* imposed upon the ideal homosexual lover. He is thus careful to distinguish between *forms* of paiderastia, placing Greek Love crucially between the vicious and the chaste:

With the baser form of paiderastia I shall have little to do in this essay. Vice of this kind does not vary to any great extent, whether we observe it in Athens or in Rome, in Florence of the sixteenth or in Paris of the nineteenth century; nor in Hellas was it more noticeable than elsewhere, except for its comparative publicity. The nobler type of masculine love developed by the Greeks is, on the contrary, almost unique in the history of the human race. It is that which more than anything else distinguishes the Greeks from the barbarians of their own time, from the Romans, and from modern men in all that appertains to the emotions. The immediate subject of the ensuing enquiry will, therefore, be that mixed form of paiderastia upon which the Greeks prided themselves, which had for its heroic ideal the friendship of Achilles and Patroclus, but which in historic times exhibited a sensuality unknown to Homer. In treating of this unique product of their civilisation I shall use the terms *Greek Love*, understanding thereby a passionate and enthusiastic attachment subsisting between man and youth, recognised by society and protected by opinion, which, though it was not free from sensuality, did not degenerate into mere licentiousness. (7-8)

It is this distinction which gives Symonds' model both its complexity and its modern pertinence. The Victorian medical and legal definition of homosexuality as a symptom of degeneracy is, here, entirely discounted; while not all forms of Greek homosexual practice were noble, he suggests, the pursuit of a paiderastic system along rigid and ideal lines allowed its members to attain moral and intellectual heights - heights denied them, even, by purely procreative acts. At its best - among the more responsible Athenian citizens, for example - Symonds understands Greek Love to have been "closely associated with liberty, manly sports, severe studies, enthusiasm, self-sacrifice, self-control, and deeds of daring"; the literature in which paiderastic practice is debated and refined, such as Pausanias' speech in the *Symposium*, he takes as articulating a "code of honour among gentlemen" (44).

To such a paradigm women, of course, have no access. The 1897 version of the *Problem* features a small chapter on 'Sexual Inversion Among Greek Women'; here Symonds considers Sappho and the masculine, dildo-sporting lesbians of Lucian's *Amores*, but, as he freely admits, he finds the discussion of Greek lesbianism 'difficult' - not because of "the absence of the phenomenon", but because "feminine homosexual passions were never worked into the social system, never became educational and military agents"

(70). There were, he points out, no female equivalents of those celebrated comrade-lovers Harmodius and Aristogeiton, Cratinus and Aristodemus.

There was no opportunity in the harem or the zenana of raising homosexual passion to the same moral and spiritual efficiency as it obtained in the camp, the palæstra, and the schools of the philosophers. Consequently, while the Greeks utilised and ennobled boy-love, they left Lesbian love to follow the same course of degeneracy as it pursues in modern times. (71)

For lesbianism, in other words, Symonds finds no prestigious historical model whatsoever; his 'degenerate' lesbian lover remains, on the contrary, confined within the parameters of modern definition.

Indeed, as its title suggests, 'Sexual Inversion Among Greek Women' is the only section of Symonds' essay in which sexological discourse is directly invoked: the Greek lesbians are "*congenitally* indifferent to the male sex"; Philænis of Attic comedy is "a Lesbian *invert*" (70-72; my emphasis). This partly reflects the circumstances of the chapter's production (Symonds' wrote it, at Ellis' request, specifically for *Sexual Inversion*); but it also throws into greater relief the particular agenda of Symonds' main text, which ultimately, I want to suggest, can only figure as something of a dissenting afterword to Ellis'. Where Ellis espouses what Eve Sedgwick has identified as a 'gender integrationist' sexual model (he understands the inverted individual to be the victim of an unbalanced distribution of male and female "germs"⁵⁶), the Greek Lovers in Symonds' (male) 'gender separatist' model are neither emasculated nor enfeebled by the pursuit of homosexual pleasure, but both strengthened by it and made more manly.⁵⁷ "Fire and valour, rather than tenderness and tears, were the external outcome of this passion", he writes; "nor had *Malachia*, effeminacy, a place in its vocabulary" (8). Symonds' homosexual apologia depends not, then, as Robert Aldrich suggests, upon a simple "idealisation of 'inversion'";⁵⁸ on the contrary, his invocation of the Greek model is, above all, anti-somatic: he locates homosexuality not in the individual (inverted) body, but in the homosocial *body politic*. For all his intentions to remove the stigma of

⁵⁶ Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion*, 1st edition (London, 1897), pp. 132-3. Further references to this edition will be included in the text.

⁵⁷ See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Across Gender, Across Sexuality: Willa Cather and Others', in *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 88 (1989), pp. 53-72.

⁵⁸ Aldrich, *Seduction*, p. 83.

degeneracy from homosexuality, Ellis in *Sexual Inversion* retained the debility model in which the invert "is specially liable to suffer from a high degree of neurasthenia, often involving much nervous weakness and irritability, loss of self-control and genital hyperaesthesia" (144). But as Symonds pointed out in *Greek Ethics*' companion 'problem', *A Problem in Modern Ethics* (1891), somatic theories of homosexuality lose their authority in the face of homosexual *institutions*: "It would be absurd to maintain", he argues there, "that all the boy-lovers of ancient Greece owed their instincts to hereditary neuropathy complicated with onanism".⁵⁹

Symonds' relationship with sexology was, clearly, a complicated one.⁶⁰ His sense of himself as "a type of man who has not yet been classified" led him to welcome the new forum sexology provided for (in Foucault's understanding, *demandé of*⁶¹) its homosexual subjects, even while he drew attention to homosexuality's apparently ancient and noble history. Above all, he seems to have found sexological discourse *expedient*, and was ready to exploit it for the wider publication of his Greek thesis just as, as Case XVIII, he used it to give voice to otherwise unpublishable erotic fantasies. He confessed as much in a letter to Carpenter:

I am so glad that H. Ellis has told you about our project. I never saw him. But I like his way of corresponding on this subject. And I need somebody of medical importance to collaborate with. Alone, I could make but little effect - the effect of an eccentric.

We are agreed enough upon fundamental points. The only difference is that he is too much inclined to stick to the neuropathical theory of explanation. But I am whittling that away to a minimum. And I don't think it politic to break off from the traditional line of analysis [...] I mean to introduce a new feature into the discussion, by giving a complete account of homosexual love in ancient Greece.⁶²

This "new feature", as we've seen, constituted a quite radical challenge to sexological assumptions.

⁵⁹ John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Modern Ethics* (London, 1896), p. 47. Carpenter had made the same point two years earlier: "whether the Dorian Greeks were particularly troubled by nervous degeneration", he wrote in *Homogenic Love* (p. 27), "we may well doubt!"

⁶⁰ For an inspired reading of the Symonds/Ellis relationship see Wayne Koestenbaum, *Double Talk: The erotics of male literary collaboration* (New York and London, 1989).

⁶¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth, 1984), pp. 38-39. Byrne S. Fone gives a stimulating reading of the homosexual 'confessions' of *Sexual Inversion* when he places them alongside Whitman's 'confessional' poetry: *Masculine Landscapes: Walt Whitman and the Homoerotic Text* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1992).

⁶² Letter to Carpenter dated 29/12/1892: Schueller and Peters, *Letters, Volume III* (Detroit, 1969), pp. 797-98.

Whatever resonance Symonds' Greek history of 1867 acquired when it was placed in conjunction with Ellis' theories of the 1890s was, however, quickly muted by events subsequent to *Sexual Inversion*'s publication. Symonds died (1893) before his and Ellis' text was published in Britain; the confidence expressed to Carpenter in his ability to 'whittle away' Ellis' neuropathical convictions, and his faith in the wider audience he felt the collaboration with Ellis would secure his own work, both proved to be sadly misplaced. After his death, at the request of his literary executor Horatio Brown, his essay, and all traces of his collaboration with Ellis, was removed from *Sexual Inversion*; the book itself was effectively banned only a year after its publication, and thereafter available only in the United States.⁶³

Even more revealing of the terms upon which homosexual apologia were, or were not, allowed a public airing was Ellis' obvious discomfort with the historical relativism of Symonds' essay. Like many homosexual apologists, Ellis was keen to invoke historical example in support of his arguments for increased medical and legal tolerance; he identifies Michelangelo, amongst other well-respected historical figures, as a sexual invert, Marlowe as a psychosexual hermaphrodite (lover of both sexes). However, though he acknowledges cultures such as ancient Greece, in which homosexual practices became institutionalised, he necessarily relegates such cultures beyond the scope of his inquiry; his concern is with the inverted *condition*, rather than with the 'acquired' or '*faute de mieux*' homosexuality from which he distinguishes it. "I am unable to see that homosexuality in ancient Greece", he states in his Introduction, after dutifully directing the reader to Symonds' essay, " - while of great interest as a social and psychological problem - throws light on sexual inversion as we know it in England or the United States" (24). In the book's second 1897 edition, from which Symonds' essay had been removed (but which retained the anonymous erotic testimony that buttressed Ellis' argument), Ellis is less apologetic. "As Greek paiderastia seems to me to throw little light on the nature of inversion," he says in a brisk footnote, "I have not thought it necessary to deal with it here".⁶⁴ Symonds' challenge to contemporary sexual definition had been expunged from his text; though it would be picked up again by later historians, who would make

⁶³ For details see Weeks, *Coming Out*, pp. 59-61.

⁶⁴ Havelock Ellis [and John Addington Symonds], *Sexual Inversion*, 2nd edition (London, 1897), p. 6.

their own studies in emulation of *A Problem in Greek Ethics*,⁶⁵ it was left perhaps to Charles Kains Jackson, writing from the heart of the homosexual literary subculture, to pay Symonds and his historiographical model the tribute they deserved. His black-edged, three quarter-page obituary notice in *The Artist* consigned Symonds to his illustrious Mediterranean resting-place, and honoured him as an ambassador of happier times:

Let each lay here in this grave a rose
 And breathe a prayer for England's dead,
 Keats and Shelley and Symonds, sleeping
 Here in the ancient city's keeping
 Servants true of the Lord Erôs
 And living lights of the fair times fled.⁶⁶

The homosexual tradition

Symonds' primary contribution to it may have been his reputation rather than his work, but this affirmation of the *living* bond between the present and the past was the radical heart of homosexual retrospection. Though *Sexual Inversion* enacts the defeat or supersedure of one kind of homosexual historiography by another, the somatic sexual model promoted by Ellis was far from unavailable for homosexual mobilisation. Studies such as Raffalovich's *Uranisme et unisexualité* (1896) and Xavier Mayne's 1908 *The Intersexes* made the construction of a homosexual canon - something to which Ellis had attended only in passing - their main project. Edward Carpenter's *Ioläus: An Anthology of Friendship* (1902) sought to catalogue homoerotic literary reference from the ancient Greeks and Persians to Walt Whitman; it had a German equivalent in Elisarion von Kupffer's *Lieblingsminne und Freundesliebe in der Weltliteratur* of 1900.⁶⁷ Such collections were not sexological aids so much as homosexual sourcebooks (Carpenter's anthology was known as *The Bugger's Bible* amongst booksellers⁶⁸): the roll-call of

⁶⁵ See, for example, Charles Reginald Dawes' study of Roman paederasty, *A Phase of Roman Life* (c.1914), and George Cecil Ives' *The Græco Roman View of Youth* (1926).

⁶⁶ *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture*, 1 May 1893, p. 131. Symonds died in Rome, and was buried close to Shelley's grave.

⁶⁷ Aldrich, *Seduction*, p. 112.

⁶⁸ D'Arch Smith, *Love in Earnest*, p. 21.

famous names they established attained a kind of talismanic significance for a homosexual subculture whose own literary output was characterised by enforced anonymity and conspicuous alias: ‘Numa Numantius’, ‘Philebus’, ‘Anomaly’, ‘Xavier Mayne’.⁶⁹

Invocation of the canon also allowed writers working outside the conventions of sexology and anthropology to hint and gesture when more explicit commentary was prohibited. Wilde, in the space of only six pages of *The Portrait of Mr W.H.*, assembles a veritable pantheon of homosexual heroes - Plato, Marlowe, Bacon, Michelangelo, Symonds, Montaigne, Richard Barnfield, Pater, Winckelmann - to both identify and authorise the homoeroticism of the relationship between Shakespeare and the imaginary Willie Hughes (42-47). Similarly in E. Bonney Steyne’s ‘The Last Secret’, published in *The Artist* in 1892, homosexuality’s notoriously nameless or unspeakable status is no obstacle to homosexual signification, which emerges from the conjunction of other, heavily-invested, names:

From young Greek lips a whisper fell
 Across the glowing softened dusk

 Mid scent of ambergris and musk
 From English lips again it fell
 And echoed sweetly through the dusk.

So Saadi in the garden heard
 So Marlowe caught it in the town

 In London bustle ’tis inferred
 By Southern seas it ripples on.⁷⁰

Crucially, however, such texts posit an intimacy between the homosexual present and past based upon more than just the sharing of an inverted or uranian biology. While Symonds and others had invoked ancient homosexual example only to lament its incompatibility with modern mores, Steyne envisages a homosexual *tradition* which is both antique and

⁶⁹ ‘Numa Numantius’ was the early pseudonym of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs. For more on ‘Philebus’ (John Leslie Barford) see note 15, above. ‘Anomaly’ produced the apologetic *The Invert and His Social Adjustment* in 1927. ‘Xavier Mayne’ (Edward Prime Stevenson) wrote one of the first explicitly homosexual novels in English - *Imre: A Memorandum* (1906) - as well as the homophile boys’ book *Philip and Gerald or Left to Themselves* (1891) and, of course, the sexological study *The Intersexes* (1908).

⁷⁰ *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture*, 1 August 1892, p. 227. Saadi was a thirteenth-century Persian writer of paiderastic verse.

thrillingly contemporary. The secret in question here has been passed down through the ages from one set of willing lips to another; its latest recipient, by implication, is the enlightened modern reader.

This secret is undoubtedly homosexual, but it is also *homosocial*; the anonymous 'Ballad; of Oxford' (1893; also published in *The Artist*) reminds us once again that the identifications around which the vocal homosexual subculture of the turn of the century organised itself surpassed the merely erotic to include those of gender, class and nation. The poem's speaker remembers walking "hand in hand" with his own beloved, and imagines previous generations of student lovers doing the same thing:

[...] this college that is named for the New
Saw the warring roses mingle, saw the Tudors, Stuarts, go
Sees the heresies arising, smiles on their departing too,
Keeping in the heart of Oxford secret worship of the true.
So shall this old sunny city recognise and understand
What the tie and what the secret lovers feel who 'neath the blue
In the sleepy Oxford sunshine, wandered like us, hand in hand.⁷¹

The secret homosexual tradition retrospectively identified here is also a gentlemanly one, and recalls the real homosexual secret societies of the period, such as George Cecil Ives' 'Order of Chaeronea'.⁷² Less prestigious equivalents, however, existed: once the lights are extinguished at 'Saltley College Birmingham', for example, the men's college "seems to be alive with a kind of invisible fellowship. It is as if countless precedent generations of students had come back to link their spirits with the souls and the desires of their successors" - or so, at least, thought Leonard Green, in 1916.⁷³ For these writers, the masculine realm of higher education provided a model with which to conceptualise a history that was at once personal, communal and exclusive; both they and Steyne hint at the kind of continuum or homosexual *cultural* tradition of which - as we've seen from *Sexual Inversion* - sexological discourse, with its emphasis upon fixed sexual essence,

⁷¹ *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture*, 1 July 1893, p. 213.

⁷² Founded by Ives in the 1890s, the Order of Chaeronea took its name from the famous battle of 338 B.C. in which the Sacred Band of Theban warrior lovers was defeated by Philip of Macedon; 338 B.C. thus figured for members of the Order as year one of an alternative, implicitly homosexual, historical tradition, with its own distinctive chronology (so that between members 1899, for example, was '2237'). Devotees included Laurence Housman, Charles Kains Jackson, C. R. Ashbee, Montague Summers and Samuel Cottam. See Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out*, pp. 122-7.

⁷³ Green, *Dream Comrades*, p. 67.

could give no account: a tradition in which one homosexual generation precisely *schoools* the next. The reclamation of such a tradition thus allowed nineteenth- and turn-of-the-century homosexual writers both to exploit the sexological identification of the homosexual past, and to transgress sexology's conceptual limits - allowed them to invoke an alternative, anti-somatic discourse in which homosexuality derived not from a diseased or aberrant physiology, but from the organisation of political and aesthetic, as well as erotic, *interests*.

It is this discourse that informs what has become the most famous nineteenth-century homosexual appeal to history - Oscar Wilde's 1895 court-room defence of the 'Love that dare not speak its name'. Under examination in his first trial, Wilde was requested to give his opinion of Lord Alfred Douglas' 'Two Loves', the poem which, now notoriously, pits heterosexual love against the love of "Shame". "Is it not clear", Arthur Gill, the counsel for the prosecution, pressed him, "that the love described relates to natural love and unnatural love?"; Wilde replied with a succinct and definite "No". In response to Gill's question, "What is the 'Love that dare not speak its name'?", however, he spoke eloquently, and at length.

'The Love that dare not speak its name' in this century is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare. It is that deep, spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect. It dictates and pervades great works of art like those of Shakespeare and Michelangelo [...]. It is in this century misunderstood, so much misunderstood that it may be described as the 'Love that dare not speak its name,' and on account of it I am placed where I am now. It is beautiful, it is fine, it is the noblest form of affection. There is nothing unnatural about it. It is intellectual, and it repeatedly exists between an elder and a younger man, when the elder man has intellect, and the younger man has all the joy, hope and glamour of life before him. That it should be so the world does not understand. The world mocks at it and sometimes puts one in the pillory for it.⁷⁴

Wilde is compelled to confront both the criminological and the sexological discourses of homosexuality in his courtroom speech: the former by the very circumstances of the speech itself ("on account of it I am placed where I am now"), and the latter - "There is nothing unnatural about it" - at Gill's insistence. But Wilde's speech is informed by that

⁷⁴ H. Montgomery Hyde (ed.), *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (London, 1948), p. 236. Further references will be included in the text.

alternative homosexual discourse we have seen invoked in the poetry of Raile, Steyne and others, and in Symonds' *A Problem in Greek Ethics* - a discourse which takes its cues from criminological and sexological definitions but argues that homosexual love is not vicious, but "misunderstood"; not grossly indecent but "spiritual" and "pure"; not degenerate, perverted or, indeed, *inverted* but "perfect", "beautiful", "the noblest form of affection". Within it, the modern homosexual has an ancient and aristocratic pedigree, a kinship with the founding fathers of Western culture, whose homosocial romances Wilde, like Symonds, finds re-enacted in other eras: in Jonathan's love for the shepherd-boy David, in Michelangelo's affection for Tommaso Cavalieri, in Shakespeare's passion for the mysterious young man of the Sonnets - and, by implication, in his own love for the handsome aristocrat Alfred Douglas.

We might call this discourse, which is invoked in Wilde's speech and in so much homosexual writing of the period, a *paiderastic* one. Not all of those who deployed paiderastic discourse were literally boy-lovers (though, as we shall see, many were), nor were they all, like Symonds, champions of Greek Love; some - Carpenter, for example - endorsed a Whitmanic model of Manly or Comrade Love. All, however, prioritised male bonds over heterosexual and heterosocial ones; and all, crucially, found models in the paiderastic institutions of the past for the radical restructuring of the present - a restructuring which, like the homosexual model informing it, surpassed the merely erotic. Nor was Boy-Love, Comrade Love or even Greek Love necessarily a *homosexual* identification. The modern, totalising description 'homosexuality' is, indeed, not really adequate to account for the erotic model paiderastic texts endorsed; many of the most radical articulations of male love may, in fact, have escaped official censure because the erotic models they promoted were *incommensurable* with dominant homosexual definitions. Being sensitive to the deployment of paiderastic discourse, however, allows us to discuss the range of turn-of-the-century homophile texts which, drawing on ancient cultural models, conceptualise male love less as a psycho-sexual identity than as a prestigious, utopian, endlessly renewable cultural *movement*. It is to a fuller investigation of paiderastic literature - which made crucial intersections with dominant cultural discourses emerging in the 1890s and the 1900s - that I want to turn next.

CHAPTER 2

Comrades, Boys and 'The Hardy Flower of Manlove'

As Robert Aldrich's *The Seduction of the Mediterranean* suggests, Greek Love was an intensely northern European preoccupation. The role fulfilled by ancient Greece for the homosexual subcultures of Britain and Germany seems, for many homophile fantasists in North America, for example, to have been satisfied by rather different colonised territories.¹ In the 'Chumming With a Savage' section of his 1873 *South-Sea Idylls* (which appeared in Britain in 1874 with the rather more prophetic title *Summer Cruising in the South Seas*), Charles Warren Stoddard details the sensual and sentimental relationship formed between a white traveller and a handsome Pacific islander, Kána-aná. Stoddard, like Melville in *Typee* (1846), used the "semi-civilised" locale as a setting for the kind of homoerotic bonding prohibited in Christian culture; also like Melville, he based his *Idylls* upon first-hand experience. "So fortunate as to be travelling in these very interesting Islands", he wrote to Walt Whitman from Hawaii in 1869, "I have done wonders in my intercourse with these natives. For the first time I act as my nature prompts me. [...] This is my mode of life."² Whitman, of course, constructed his influential homosexual mythology *within* the borders of his own nation; the manly romances which Stoddard and Melville, like European Hellenists, found space for only at the peripheries of Empire, he and other self-consciously 'American' poets projected onto the half-colonised landscape of America itself:

¹ This is not, of course, to suggest that American writers were not attracted to the Greek model. See Stephen Wayne Foster's 'Beauty's Purple Flame: Some Minor American Gay Poets, 1786-1936', in Wayne R. Dynes and Stephen Donaldson (eds.), *Homosexual Themes in Literary Studies* (New York and London, 1992), pp. 141-44.

² Quoted in Jonathan Katz, *Gay American History* (New York, 1992), p. 501.

Only I will establish in the Mannahatta and in every city of these States inland and
 seaboard,
 And in the fields and woods, and above every keel little or large that dents the water,
 Without edifices or rules or trustees or any argument,
 The institution of the dear love of comrades.³

Attempts to forge a radical new, implicitly homoerotic, national self-image were not, however, confined to the United States; Whitman's concern with *modernity* struck a chord with many turn-of-the-century British writers. Symonds was a particularly ardent Whitman fan - one of a group Swinburne had waspishly labelled 'Calamites'⁴ - and made the most of every opportunity to hail the American poet as the herald of a new era;⁵ in his 1880 poem 'Leuké', for example, Whitman plays John the Baptist, prophet of an imminent cultural revolution, to the new messiah of Eros.⁶ But such a vision, for Symonds, was an unusually optimistic one (and, typically, this poem appeared in the same volume as the grim 'Valley of Vain Desires'); Whitman, like Michelangelo, attracted him primarily because he seemed not modern but so *Greek*: "more truly Greek than any other man of modern times".⁷

Edward Carpenter, on the other hand, saw in Whitman's vision the blueprint for a new age, rather than the echo of an old one. He concluded *Ioläus*, his survey of seven centuries of homoerotic literature, with the extract from *Leaves of Grass* I have quoted above; he also produced a Whitmanic epic of his own, the rambling prose-poem *Towards Democracy*, which appeared in various parts between 1883 and 1902, and was the most seminal of all his writings - "the start-point and kernel of all my later work, the center from which the other books have radiated".⁸ *Towards Democracy* attempts to expose the corruption at the heart of modern England, and calls for the institution of a radical new

³ Walt Whitman, from 'I Hear it was Charged Against Me', in the 'Calamus' section of *Leaves of Grass* (Philadelphia, 1891-2), p. 107. See also some of Douglas Malloch's poetry, especially 'The Love of a Man', in his *Tote-Road and Trail: Ballads of the Lumberjack* (Indianapolis, 1917), pp. 12-13.

⁴ Timothy d'Arch Smith, *Love in Earnest* (London, 1970), p. 3.

⁵ Symonds also admired Stoddard's *South Sea Idylls* (particularly the 'Chumming with a Savage' section), and recommended it to both Horatio Brown and Edward Carpenter: see letters dated 3/9/1885 and 29/12/1892 in Herbert M. Schueller and Robert L. Peters (eds.), *The Letters of John Addington Symonds, Volume III: 1885-1893* (Detroit, 1969), pp. 75-6 and 797-98, respectively.

⁶ John Addington Symonds, *New and Old* (London, 1880), p. 39.

⁷ John Addington Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets* (London, 1873), footnote to p. 422.

⁸ Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams: Being Autobiographical Notes* (London, 1916), p. 190. Further page references, where obvious, will be included in the text.

social order; in Part IV, *Who Shall Command the Heart* (1902), the homoerotic content of this order is made explicit. Carpenter imagines a "new conception of Life", privileging

The love of men for each other - so tender, heroic, constant;
That has come all down the ages, in every clime, in every nation,
Always so true, so well assured of itself, overleaping barriers of age, of rank,
of distance,
Flag of the camp of Freedom;
The love of women for each other - so rapt, intense, so confiding-close, so
burning passionate,
To unheard deeds of sacrifice, of daring and devotion, prompting;
And (not less) the love of men for women, and of women for men - on a newer
greater scale than it has hitherto been conceived;
Grand, free and equal - gracious yet ever incommensurable -
The soul of Comradeship glides in.⁹

This is a generous vision, but a crafty one, for here homosexual love forms a model for the aspirations of heterosexual lovers - rather than, as in conventional sexological discourse, the other way around. The icon of the new democracy offered in Part I of the poem is, indeed, a masculine one: a working man, "easy with open shirt, and brown neck and face", who strolls through the "sultry twilight" of the city, cynosure of all desiring eyes - male and female.¹⁰ Though Carpenter imagines it enjoyed by women as well as men, the radical new love lauded here is based implicitly upon the ancient *manly* model of comradeship. Appropriating Whitman's mid-century, intensely American, vision for a *fin-de-siècle* British audience, Carpenter offered comradeship as an essentially *healing* phenomenon, an antidote to the infirmity afflicting modern England and its over-breeding, under-nourished population; the millenarian *Towards Democracy* emerged, of course, alongside the sexological essays of *Homogenic Love*, *Love's Coming of Age* and *The Intermediate Sex* in which, in a subversion of the Darwinian paradigm, homosexuals constitute an evolutionary advance upon their procreative fellows.

This simultaneous concern with ancient and radically new social models, this attempt to synthesise the classical and the ultra-contemporary, was a feature of much homophile writing of the period. In chapter 1 I discussed the considerable attraction exerted over late Victorian homosexual writers by historical models in general and the

⁹ Edward Carpenter, *Who Shall Command the Heart: Being Part IV of Towards Democracy* (London and Manchester, 1902), pp. 30-31.

¹⁰ Edward Carpenter, *Towards Democracy* (Manchester and London, 1883), pp. 46-7.

paiderastic paradigm in particular; I suggested that Wilde's famous court-room defence of homosexuality, which identified a rehearsal of paiderastia in a range of eras, including the present, invoked an alternative, non- or anti-hegemonic homosexual discourse. It could, of course, be argued that the Wilde trial itself effected the spectacular *defeat* of affirmative homosexual definition; critics have suggested, for example, that it brought an era of relatively strident homosexual literary expression to a close.¹¹ The controversy stirred up by the trial certainly threw many potentially radical publishers into a panic. Carpenter recalls in his autobiography *My Days and Dreams* how "five or six publishers [...] shook their heads" over the manuscript of *Love's Coming of Age* in 1896. "The Wilde trial", he writes, "had done its work; and silence must henceforth reign on sex-subjects." But, writing in 1915, he adds this:

It is curious to think that that was not twenty years ago, and what a landslide has occurred since then! In '96 no 'respectable' publisher would touch the volume, and yet to-day [...] the tide of such literature has flowed so full and fast that my book has already become quite a little old fashioned and demure! (196-7)

The cultural climate did indeed change enormously over the turn of the century; by the end of the First World War, it would have altered more radically still. In this chapter I shall be examining the work of a group of writers who exploited contemporary cultural instabilities to transport the affirmative discourse of the Victorian homosexual subculture beyond the Wilde trial and into the twentieth century. While they valued the Greek model - and respected particularly the Greek Love trope they had inherited from a previous generation of homosexual apologists - writers such as Charles Kains Jackson, William Paine and E. E. Bradford sought neither to return to ancient Greece nor to mourn its loss, but, like Carpenter, championed a radical social restructuring along paiderastic lines. They called, indeed, not just for a modern paiderastia, but for an essentially *British* one; and at the heart of their utopian speculations were two privileged but highly-charged and contested icons of British masculinity: the comrade and the boy.

¹¹ Brian Reade, for example, sees the Wilde trial as signalling the end of "a non-hostile climate of taste and opinion" regarding homosexuality: *Sexual Heretics* (London, 1970), p. 53.

Comrade Love

Despite its obvious homoerotic bias, the attractions of Carpenter's comradeship model (and of Whitman's, which offered itself even less to female appropriation)¹² were far from restricted to homosexual men. His supporters included individuals pursuing a policy of sexual celibacy, heterosexual couples attempting to redefine the marriage contract or dispense with it altogether, and female romantic friends - Helena Born and Miriam Daniell, for example - who gave their own lectures, and published their own books, on the comradeship theme.¹³ The catholicity of Carpenter's appeal lay partly in the ambiguities of the term 'comrade' itself, which resonates in his work precisely at the intersection of homophile and socialist discourses. Since the late nineteenth century the concept of comradeship had, moreover, become a privileged one within the allied discourses of 'muscular' Christianity and Christian militarism. Books and sermons like W. J. Dawson's *The Comrade-Christ* (1894) and the Archbishop of Canterbury's *Captains and Comrades in the Faith* (1911) presented the Church fathers to their readers as both friends and comrades-in-arms.¹⁴ Edward T. Slater's *Comradeship* (1924) - dedicated to "My Comrades in the C.E.M.S. [the Church of England's Men's Society]" - offered Christian comradeship as the fulfilment of a venerable homophile tradition:

Comradeship [it begins] is a good old word. It comes to us through the Spanish, and goes back to days when men roamed about and housed together in covered waggons or caravans. Literally it means sharing the same 'camera,' or room, and is seen exactly in the word 'chum,' which was used in the seventeenth century for the students at Oxford who shared rooms in the Colleges. [...] It is no forced growth but surely a primary

¹² As Byrne R. S. Fone notes, the 'Comradeship' eulogised in both *Calamus* and Whitman's notebooks "represents an emotion [...] of which women are incapable". *Masculine Landscapes: Walt Whitman and the Homoerotic Text* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1992), p. 95.

¹³ Sheila Rowbotham discusses the range of identifications among Carpenter's supporters in her and Jeffrey Weeks' *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (London, 1977). For more on the fascinating Born and Daniell, see Helen Tufts' 'Biographical Introduction' to her collection of Born's essays, *Whitman's Ideal Democracy and Other Writings by Helena Born* (Boston, 1902). Other women who appreciated the Whitman/Carpenter homoerotic vision included the suffragists (and possible lovers) Emily Wilding Davison and Mary Leigh; the former seemingly annotated a copy of Whitman's poetry on the latter's behalf, and inscribed it "from Comrade Davison to Comrade Leigh". See Liz Stanley, 'Romantic Friendship? Some issues in researching lesbian history and biography', in *Women's History Review*, 1 (2) (1992), pp. 193-216.

¹⁴ W. J. Dawson, *The Comrade-Christ and Other Sermons* (London, 1894); Randall Thomas Davidson [Archbishop of Canterbury], *Captains and Comrades in the Faith: Sermons Historical and Biographical* (London, 1911).

instinct in human nature that draws men together and creates comradeship, and it is an instinct that can be guided and strengthened till it rises to Christian fellowship in the highest sense.¹⁵

The similarities between Slater's nostalgic/utopian vision and that of Carpenter are obvious; we should not forget that Carpenter himself, with his Anglican roots (he had been ordained a deacon in 1869) and his continuing role in the Labour Church movement, had a substantial investment in religious discourse.¹⁶

However, where the Church sought to harness comradeship to a larger model of familial, national and ultimately imperial cohesion - Slater's book contains successive chapters on 'Comradeship in the Home', 'Comradeship in the Parish' and 'The Comradeship of Nations' - Carpenter's comradeship was an essentially subversive phenomenon. Once his reputation as the British prophet of Whitmanic democracy was established, his self-sufficient home in Millfield became the celebrated centre of a radical community for whom comradely bonds were forged primarily across the gulfs of economic and gender inequalities: "a *rendezvous*", in Carpenter's own words, "for all classes and conditions of society."

Architects, railway clerks, engine-drivers, signalmen, naval and military officers, Cambridge and Oxford dons, students, advanced women, suffragettes, professors and provision-merchants, came into touch in my little house and garden; parsons and positivists, printers and authors, scythesmiths and surgeons, bank managers and quarrymen, met with each other. Young colliers from the neighbouring mines put on the boxing-gloves with sprigs of aristocracy; learned professors sat down with farm-lads.¹⁷

Carpenter's heterogeneous ideal is nevertheless overwhelmingly masculine; his model of comradeship was, of course, one in which prohibitions on social intercourse between classes, and on *sexual* intercourse between *men*, might be challenged simultaneously. (Indeed, the revalorisation and eroticisation of terms like 'comrade' and 'friend' was undertaken by homosexuals precisely in an attempt to counter their exclusion from

¹⁵ Edward T. Slater, *Comradeship* (London, 1924), p. 7.

¹⁶ See Christopher E. Shaw, 'Identified with the One: Edward Carpenter, Henry Salt and the Ethical Socialist Philosophy of Science', in Tony Brown (ed.), *Edward Carpenter and Late Victorian Radicalism* (London, 1990), pp. 33-57. Mary Davis, in *Comrade or Brother?: The History of the British Labour Movement 1789-1951* (London, 1993), p. 107, points out the strong links between the Church and late Victorian socialism in general.

¹⁷ Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, p. 164.

hegemonic familial and romantic models.) Carpenter himself enjoyed relationships at Millfield with working-class men - the last, and most lasting, of these with his lover of nearly forty years, George Merrill. For many of Carpenter's supporters, forming a cross-class bond was a way of making sexual practice indistinguishable from political statement - though, as Weeks points out, the idealisation of working men by wealthy homosexuals sometimes veered disturbingly towards "sexual colonialism".¹⁸ When Carpenter's socialist colleague C. R. Ashbee anxiously formed a relationship with a working-class youth in 1914, he was reassured by middle-class friends. "I haven't a doubt", Laurence Housman told him, "of the extraordinary humanising and educative values which do come out of these rapprochements".¹⁹

Ashbee was, in fact, only putting into practice utopian theories he had been formulating for many years. His 1894 *A Few Chapters in Workshop Re-Construction and Citizenship*, which proposes a refashioning of the relations between male bodies in the modern industrial workplace, identifies an alternative, non-exploitative tradition in which labour is organised on the principle of 'friendship':

It is not new in itself; this, the feeling that drew Jesus to John, or Shakespeare to the youth of the sonnets, or that inspired the friendships of Greece, has been with us before, and in the new citizenship we shall need it again. The Whitmanic love of comrades is its modern expression, Democracy - as socially, not politically, conceived - its basis. [...] The freer, more direct, and more genuine, relationship between men, which is implied by it, must be the ultimate basis of the re-constructed Workshop.²⁰

Ashbee's vision anticipated and complemented that of Carpenter (and, of course, that of Wilde), who included these thoughts on new citizenship in the appendix to *The Intermediate Sex*. While the value of comradeship was seen to lie precisely in its novelty, the challenge it offered to the contemporary evils of materialism and class inequity was, clearly, understood to tap into older, implicitly wiser, cultural models. Around the turn of the century Ashbee seems to have joined Ives' Order of Chaeronea;²¹ in 1908 he wrote *Conradin: A Philosophical Ballad*, a long poem which tells the story of the

¹⁸ Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out* (London 1990), p. 126.

¹⁹ Quoted in Weeks, *Coming Out*, p. 125.

²⁰ C. R. Ashbee, *A Few Chapters in Workshop Re-Construction and Citizenship* (London, 1894), pp. 160-1.

²¹ See Weeks, *Coming Out*, p. 124.



beautiful young King who was beheaded by Charles of Anjou in 1268. Other homosexual writers found Conradin a compelling figure - especially, perhaps, in the light of the romantic friendship he formed with Frederick of Baden, the comrade who voluntarily followed him to the scaffold.²² Ashbee's poem ends on the King's death, but hints that he might one day return - to preside, perhaps, over the revolutionary, implicitly homophile, "new citizenship".

The resonance of that adjective *new* for social commentators at the turn of the century is not to be underestimated. By the 1890s the word - appropriately capitalised - had become a potent, but an over-burdened, signifier: the second half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of movements as diverse as New Journalism, New Liberalism and New Hedonism, not to mention such startling individuals as the New Woman and the New Man.²³ With a talismanic significance similar, perhaps, to that attained by the prefix 'post' in the current *fin de siècle*, *New* could be a challenging or a deeply reactionary description depending on the context in which it was employed, inspired in its users a variety of emotions ranging from millenarian exhilaration to apocalyptic dismay. For observers of the late nineteenth century's social upheavals, and for those who sought to inflect and exploit cultural change, simply no other word was as appropriate or as useful. These included homosexual writers like Charles Kains Jackson and E. E. Bradford who, like Carpenter and Ashbee, wrote confidently about the imminent emergence of a new society, but drew on a rather different ideology of national progress - that of eugenics.

²² Conradin's story figures as a pederastic referent in French writer Georges Eekhoud's historical novel *Escal-Vigor* of 1899; the German author of the homosexual romance *Ein Jünger Platos* (1913), actually took 'Konradin' as his suggestive *nom de plume* (see Aldrich, *Seduction*, pp. 114-5, for a plot summary). 'Xavier Mayne', in *The Intersexes* ([Naples], 1908), identifies Conradin as "indubitably [...] homosexual" (p. 192); see Noel I. Garde, *Jonathan to Gide: the Homosexual in History* (1964), for details of the King's life.

²³ For more on New Liberalism, New Journalism and New Hedonism, see Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London, 1992), and John Stokes, *In the Nineties* (Hemel Hempstead and Chicago, 1989). For more on the New Woman and Man, see Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (Harmondsworth, 1990).

‘The New Chivalry’

Symonds, at the end of *A Problem in Greek Ethics*, had traced the demise of homosexuality in the modern period to a combination of the Christian "separation from nature" and the Middle Ages' chivalrous celebration of femininity;²⁴ in a letter to Carpenter of 1892 he wrote of his "dream" of a "new chivalry" in which those homosexual impulses - "pariah and outcast now" - might be celebrated and ennobled.²⁵ Two years later, in the year which saw the publication of Ashbee's thoughts on the 'new citizenship', an article emerged from the heart of the homosexual subculture apparently offering the fulfilment of Symonds' vision. Kains Jackson's 'The New Chivalry', published in his own journal *The Artist*, proposes a revival of the ancient institution of comradeship as a counter to pressing historical factors - primarily the new, supposed, threat of over-population. "For five centuries in England", he argues, "the necessity that the race should increase and multiply has been paramount, but these five centuries of assistance have now secured their result, and we need at the present time no more than not go back in numbers, at the same time that we greatly need to increase in the average of wealth".²⁶

The "wealth" Kains Jackson has in mind here is the eugenicist wealth: the nation's moral and intellectual, rather than economic, capital. By the 1890s the concept of eugenics - a term first coined by Francis Galton in 1886 - was a commonplace one, and arguments for and against the selective breeding of superior individuals, and the enforced *debreeding* of defective national stock ("negative eugenics"), were propounded in a variety of scholarly and popular media.²⁷ Like socialist commentators, eugenicists advocated a radical restructuring of society. Galton, in a lecture of 1901 entitled 'The Possible Improvement of the Human Breed', proposed the examination of young men and women and the issuing of diplomas to those of patently superior stock, with a view to encouraging their intermarriages; and the awarding of dowries, and cheap housing, to

²⁴ John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (London, 1901), p. 73.

²⁵ Schueller and Peters, *Letters*, Volume III, p. 199.

²⁶ P.C. [i.e. Charles (Philip Castle) Kains Jackson], 'The New Chivalry', in *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture*, 2 April 1894, pp. 102-4, p. 103. Further references will be included in the text.

²⁷ See Lyndsay Andrew Farrall, *The Origins and Growth of the English Eugenics Movement 1865-1925* (New York, 1985).

those couples who lacked the financial means to marry, and breed, early. The eugenicist espousal of a Darwinian model based on the 'survival of the fittest', however, was basically inimical to socialist theory (though not to all socialist theorists - Weeks notes the attraction exerted by eugenics over many Fabian, and even some militant, socialists²⁸). The capitalist paradigm - a popular one amongst social commentators of all persuasions - had, moreover, often been used to discredit homosexual relations in particular. Ellis, for example, speculated that the high incidence of sexual inversion in nervous and debilitated families might be "Nature's merciful method of winding up a concern which, from her point of view, has ceased to be profitable".²⁹ Nevertheless, the eugenic emphasis upon race progress could operate in rather disturbing proximity to the millenarianism of Comrade Love; Kains Jackson here manages to prioritise homosocial bonding over heterosexual breeding by combining eugenicist discourse with the old Socratic model of spiritual progeniture:

the flower of the adult and perfect civilization will be found in the New Chivalry or the exaltation of the youthful masculine ideal. The time has arrived when the eternal desire for Love which nature has implanted in the breast of man requires to be satisfied without such an increase in population as has characterised the past. (103)

'The New Chivalry' is actually a skilful negotiation of a variety of cultural idioms; Kains Jackson's proposition that institutionalised homosexuality might serve as a form of contraception, for example, needs to be read alongside the redefinition of sexual relations in terms of *heterosexual* pleasure implicit in more orthodox birth control discourse. Kains Jackson is explicit, in fact, in his condemnation of traditional methods of contraception - what he refers to as the "'French vice'" (103); but he rejects them on the grounds not - as in the discourse of social purity - that they are immoral, but that they are *unaesthetic*. In the New Chivalry, Kains Jackson claims, aesthetic rather than "animal" considerations will be the priority:

A beautiful girl will be desired before a plain lad, but a plain girl will not be considered in the presence of a handsome boy. Where boy and girl are of equal outward grace the

²⁸ See the section on eugenics in his *Sex, Politics and Society: The regulation of sexuality since 1800* (London, 1989), pp. 128-37.

²⁹ Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion*, 1st edition (London, 1897), p. 146.

spiritual ideal will prevail over the animal and the desire of influencing the higher mind, the boy's, will prevail over the old desire to add to the population. (103)

The 'purely aesthetic' system Kains Jackson longs to see instituted has, of course, intimate links with a more dominant Victorian ideology of gender that is at best anti-feminist, at worst misogynist.³⁰ It is a feature of gender-separatist models to endorse a form of sexual essentialism, even while constituting a radical challenge to sexual organisation. 'Xavier Mayne', proposing the Uranian as the most manly member of his sex, the Uraniad as the most womanly of hers, attempted to dismantle sexual invert stereotypes; but his maintenance of more basic gender role models meant that, while the Uranian emerges from his formulation as a doubly superior being, the Uraniad is "by no means so freely-endowed, so ethereal, so interesting an intersex" - precisely *because* her "inherently feminine shortcomings" are so "pronounced".³¹ The New Chivalry's redefinition of cultural priorities - the discrediting of the procreative imperative, the abandonment of "irksome or fatuous ties" in the form of marriage contracts - seems to hold out the promise of sexual liberation to women and men alike; seems, indeed, to meet demands that were being issued by the more radical sections of the contemporary feminist movement. But the cultural paradigm it prioritises in their place - co-operative bonding between intelligent, virile individuals - is precisely one to which gender separatist models (though ironically not gender integrationist - inverted or third sex - models) allowed women no access:

The joys of the palaestra, of the river, of the hunt and of the moor, the evening tent-pitching of campers out, and the exhilaration of the early morning swim, for one pleasure of life and physical delight in each other's presence, touch and voice which man and woman ordinarily share, it is not too much to say that the new chivalry has ten. (104)

Above all, women have no place in Kains Jackson's vision because the paradigm he seeks to see restored is a paiderastic one. "As in Sparta", he writes, "so once more, will the lover be the inbreather - eispnêlos, the beloved 'the listener,' - aïtes. A royal road to learning will be found" (103). As Symonds had demonstrated, there was simply no female

³⁰ Elaine Showalter discusses the misogynist aspects of nineteenth-century homosocial and homosexual texts (including Kains Jackson's) in *Sexual Anarchy*.

³¹ Mayne [pseud. Edward Prime Stevenson], *The Intersexes*, p. 129.

paiderastic equivalent; for Kains Jackson, implicitly endorsing Victorian medical opinion on female intellectual incapacity, women are naturally excluded from the pedagogic/erotic bond³²: "The mind of adolescent manhood being the development stage of potentially greater powers, must needs be capable under stimulus and guidance, of sweeter and fuller flower than that of girlhood". While "no woman wishes to be loved for her intellect," he claims, "youth is proud to be helped to learn" (104).

The power of Kains Jackson's paiderastic vision derived, as I have suggested, not from a dismantling of eugenicist ideology but from a reorganisation of it. Central to Galton's model, in which the racial elite would be drawn not just from the aristocracy proper but from a range of classes, was the system of *patronage*: "that wholesome practice [...] of wealthy persons interesting themselves in and befriending poor but promising lads"; that "kindly and honourable relation between a wealthy man who has made his position in the world and a youth who is avowedly his equal in natural gifts, but who has yet to make it".³³ The similarities between this paradigm, in which an older man facilitates the passage of a younger into the cultural aristocracy, and the Greek pedagogic institution involving, as Foucault notes, "the transmission of a precious knowledge from one [male] body to another", are obvious.³⁴ To writers preoccupied, like Kains Jackson, with the promotion as well as the celebration of homophilia, eugenic theories of social control became increasingly available for appropriation and revision. From the overlapping investments placed by eugenic and homophile ideology in the young, male, imperial citizen emerged the literary and erotic movement of 'Boy-Love'. Like New Chivalry, Boy-Love identified the man-boy dyad as the site, not of sexual, but of cultural reproduction, and privileged the boy himself as the receptacle of homophile wisdom.

³² For an example of medical scaremongering over the issue of higher education for women, see Henry Maudsley's 'Sex in Mind and Education', in *The Fortnightly Review*, 1 April 1874, pp. 466-83. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson responded a month later, admirably, with 'Sex in Mind and Education: A Reply' (pp. 582-94).

³³ Sir Francis Galton, 'The Possible Improvement of the Human Breed, Under the Existing Conditions of Law and Sentiment', in *Essays in Eugenics* (London, 1909), pp. 30-31.

³⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth, 1984), p. 61.

Boy-Love

"If we in England seek some living echo of [Greek statuary's] melody of curving lines," Symonds had written in his *Studies of the Greek Poets*, "we must visit the fields where boys bathe in early morning, or the playgrounds of our public schools in summer, or the banks of the Isis when the eights are on the water, or the riding-schools of young soldiers. We cannot reconstitute the elements of Greek life: but here and there we may gain hints for adding breath and pulse and movement to Greek sculpture".³⁵ Symonds, as we've seen, was pessimistic about the possibility of reviving Greek ideals, but nevertheless enjoyed the fantasy of reliving paiderastic congress: here, he casts himself in the role of a modern *erastes*, watching beautiful youths at play and, perhaps, selecting from amongst them his own *eromenos*. In 'The Genius of the Vatican' (1878) the sheer weight of his desire to add "breath and pulse and movement" to Greek sculpture rouses the Praxitelean Cupid (the statue which had so haunted his youth) to a kind of animation. "Oh, come away!" the statue, with its "mute lips", urges: "Some woodland we will seek,/ And lie together by the stream, and twine/ Rare flowers to wreath our hair". The vision of the animated statue is, of course, a vain - "ah, how vain!" - fancy; Symonds takes a little consolation, however, in the thought that the Cupid's very immutability will ensure its endless iconic appeal: "Thousands shall dote on thee when I am dead,/ And thou inanimate still hang thy pensive head".³⁶ The desire to *revivify* ancient Greece was an urgent one among men to whom the ossified remains of Greek culture nevertheless seemed to speak so directly, and so intimately. *The Artist* proposed its 'Subjects for Pictures' partly, as it made clear in the article's preface, in a defence of *naturalism*. "Naturalism alone", it argued, "can clothe the past anew in bodily beauty and fleshly form, can alone send the live blood coursing once more through the dried up veins, can alone fulfil the prayer of the prophet and 'make these dry bones live'".³⁷

A sonnet by S. S. Saale which had been published in the same periodical in 1890, however, offered a much more tangible model of revivification:

³⁵ John Addington Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets* (London, 1873), p. 408.

³⁶ John Addington Symonds, *Many Moods* (London, 1878), pp. 22-3.

³⁷ *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture*, 1 July 1889, p. 194.

Upon the wall, of idling boys in a row,
 The grimy barges not more dull than they
 When sudden in the midst of all their play
 They strip and plunge into the stream below;
 Changed by a miracle, they rise as though
 The youth of Greece burst on this later day,
 As on their lithe young bodies many a ray
 Of sunlight dallies with its blushing glow.
 Flower of clear beauty, naked purity,
 With thy sweet presence olden days return,
 Like fragrant ashes from a classic urn,
 Flashed into life anew once more we see
 Narcissus by the pool, or 'neath the tree
 Young Daphnis, and new pulses throb and burn.³⁸

Here, it is not a statue that is brought to life - though the myth of Pygmalion does, perhaps, form a subtext to Saale's vision, as it would, twenty years later, to George Bernard Shaw's.³⁹ Rather, a group of working class boys is transformed under the observer's informed gaze into the aristocracy of paiderastia. The 'throbbing and burning' pulses belong here both to the boys, who, once 'stripped', experience frank and uninhibited enjoyment of their own bodies; and to the watcher, who takes his own pleasure from the contemplation of theirs. The pulses, above all, are those of the "youth of Greece", who are more decidedly 'reconstituted' in this watery apotheosis than in that imagined by Symonds: reconstituted not by the boys themselves - who are, when clothed, 'dull' - but by the scholarly male observer, who alone is capable of investing their actions with significance.

Four decades later the scenario enjoyed by Saale would be revisited by S. E. Cottam in his collection of poems *Cameos of Boyhood* (1930). In this volume boys, and man-boy relations, are frankly celebrated, the Hellenic model routinely but significantly invoked: the coy 'To -.' imagines a "lake of waters free/ Where English boyhood swims,/ Where all, who have the eyes, can see/ The thews of Grecian limbs".⁴⁰ That "all, who

³⁸ S. S. Saale, 'Sonnet', in *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture*, 1 September 1890, p. 275.

³⁹ Pygmalion was, of course, the Cypriot king who (at least according to Ovid) so despaired of finding a mortal female worthy of his affection that he carved his own ideal woman out of ivory. He fell in love with the statue, which Aphrodite kindly brought to life for him. Pygmalion and the ex-statue subsequently married. In Shaw's 1914 play *Pygmalion* a phonetician transforms a Cockney flower-seller into a 'lady'. Richard Jenkyns discusses the appeal of the Pygmalion myth to nineteenth-century writers in his chapter 'The Consequences of Sculpture', in *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford, 1980).

⁴⁰ S. E. Cottam, *Cameos of Boyhood and Other Poems* (London, 1930), p. 10. Further references will be included in the text.

have the eyes" is, of course, crucial; it was precisely in the conjunction of young male bodies and the appropriative gaze of patronising (in many senses of the word) older men that commentators located the new paiderastic ideal - an ideal which both revived Greek customs and, perhaps, surpassed them. "Is Boy-Love Greek?" E. E. Bradford asked in 1918; "Far off across the seas/ The warm desire of Southern men may be:/ But passion freshened by a Northern breeze/ Gains in male vigour and in purity".⁴¹ Between the 1890s and the 1930s Boy-Love constituted a distinct erotic identification around which many homosexual writers organised themselves and their work. Produced by men who were frequently schoolmasters or ministers (both Cottam and Bradford were clergymen), and nurtured therefore in the homosocial milieux of public school, university and High Church, where the fleeting intimacy between an older man and a youth was, perhaps, one of the few socially-sanctioned forms of passionate male bonding,⁴² Boy-Love poetry was intensely misogynist, but often spectacularly sexually subversive. Boy-Love poets resisted the prescriptions and protested at the *proscriptions* of the heterosexual hegemony, calling, as Kains Jackson had, for the restructuring of society along homophile lines (Francis Murray published his 1923 *Rondeaux of Boyhood*, for example, under the suggestive pseudonym 'A. Newman'), and an ever-strengthening gender separatism. Various critics have addressed the Boy-Love phenomenon - most notably (and exhaustively) Timothy d'Arch Smith in his 1970 *Love in Earnest*, which retrospectively and influentially identified the movement as 'Uranian'. Few, however, have had much to say about either the cultural discourses informing Boy-Love, or the radical homoerotic discourse - what I have been calling a *paiderastic* discourse - orchestrated by Boy-Love literature itself.⁴³

To understand Boy-Love we need primarily to appreciate the status of the young British male in turn-of-the-century culture. While Saale's interest in working class lads is clearly erotic, it is not dissimilar to that ostensibly very different concern with boys and boy welfare with which, increasingly over the turn of the century, men of the middle and upper classes found themselves becoming preoccupied. Even more than the comrade, the

⁴¹ Rev. E. E. Bradford, 'Boy-Love', in *The New Chivalry and Other Poems* (London, 1918), p. 31.

⁴² For an account of the considerable male homosexual presence in the Anglo-Catholic church see David Hilliard, 'UnEnglish and Unmanly: Anglo-Catholicism and Homosexuality', in *Victorian Studies*, 25 (2) (Winter 1982), pp. 181-210.

⁴³ Though see Alan Sinfield's recent *The Wilde Century* (London, 1994), especially chapter 5. Sinfield discusses Boy-Love as one of the range of pre-gay homosexual identifications circulating at a time when "concepts of same-sex passion were still up for grabs" (p. 110).

boy was in the 1890s and 1900s a debated, contested and scrutinised beast: it was this period which saw the emergence both of the new cultural phenomenon of the 'boy question', and the terms - 'adolescent', 'hooligan' - with which the phenomenon could be addressed.⁴⁴ Social commentators of the late nineteenth century onwards presented Britain's cities as being overflowing with youths who had left school in their early teens, faced an uncertain future at the hands of unscrupulous employers or, perhaps (after 1910, when the institution was first introduced), the labour exchange, and were vulnerable to all the temptations their urban, often squalid, environments might throw at them. Anxieties about boys fed directly into eugenic fears about 'race-suicide': Britain seemed to be squandering its investment in the national future by allowing its young men to grow up into under-nourished, unfit and perhaps immoral adults. "The boy", wrote Douglas Halliday Macartney in his 1917 pamphlet *Boy Welfare*, "must be regarded as a future citizen; as an industrial and national asset, and as possessing the right to be sufficiently well clothed, well fed, and well housed; and if the state performs her part, Great Britain and the British Empire will be a healthier and happier country".⁴⁵ The slip between empire and country in Halliday's last remark is telling: a robust race of boys was required not least for the future settlement, government and defence of Britain's considerable but increasingly unmanageable imperial estate.

In direct response to the kinds of anxieties voiced in Halliday's pamphlet an entire industry devoted to the protection and nurturance of middle- and working-class boys sprang into being. Throughout the 1870s and '80s boys' clubs of all varieties, rural and urban, were established; in 1883 the influential Boys' Brigade was founded.⁴⁶ 1907 became, at the YMCA's designation, 'Boys' Year'; 1908 saw the foundation of Baden-Powell's extraordinarily successful Boy Scouts movement.⁴⁷ Brigades, boys' clubs and youth movements of all kinds sought to appropriate and structure boys' leisure hours, and to inculcate in them a spirit of group identity extending into neighbourhood, nation and

⁴⁴ For more on the rise of the concept of adolescence, see John R. Gillis, *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations, 1770-Present* (New York, 1981). For more on the hooligan (who entered the British public arena in 1898), see Joseph Bristow, *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World* (London, 1991), p. 183.

⁴⁵ Douglas Halliday Macartney, *Boy Welfare* (London, 1917), p. 9.

⁴⁶ See Frank Dawes, *A Cry from the Streets: The Boys' Club Movement in Britain from the 1850s to the Present Day* (Hove, 1975).

⁴⁷ Bristow, *Empire Boys*, p. 187. Bristow's book in general, and its final chapter in particular, are relevant here.

empire. Like Saale, Baden-Powell worked on the premise that ordinary boys, even the apparently most 'dull', contained a valuable potential that required only correct cultivation. Again as in Saale's poem, the role of the adult, middle-class male in this cultivation was crucial. If the notoriously versatile Boy Scouts were trained as imperial agents - guided, as Joseph Bristow points out, "towards mastering techniques to conquer and, importantly, to preserve a previously undiscovered world"⁴⁸ - 'K.M.L.'s 'An Appeal to the Universities', a 1925 article in the newly-founded magazine *The Boy*, reveals how boys themselves were yoked to a narrative of imperial adventure directed towards the intrepid undergraduate:

Here there is scope for pioneer minds, and unexplored territory more dangerous than Central Africa, with big prizes and high stakes, and demanding greater administrative judgement than all the villages of India. The territory is urban and rural adolescence; the dangers and fears are internal, and belong to the man himself, the danger of patronage and the fear of incapacity; the prizes are honourable work and requited effort; the stakes are the future of England.⁴⁹

K.M.L. is identified in the magazine's list of contributors as Kenneth Lindsay, "an Oxford Soccer 'Blue' [...] who recently stood as Labour Candidate for Oxford City"; the magazine itself was edited by R. S. Tunnell, available for correspondence sometimes at Clare College, Cambridge, sometimes at Toynbee Hall, the East End university settlement. Anxiety over the welfare of boys was clearly often the product of a curious combination of socialism, philanthropy and class imperialism.

Like the supporters of 'comradeship', indeed, many of those who took an interest in boys were confident that increased intercourse between upper-class men and working-class youths was the key to social reconstruction; some even saw in the current revalorisation of man-boy relations a hint of the kind of cultural revolution predicted by homosexual writers in the 1890s. In two books written in the early 1910s, for example, William Paine, a social commentator who had for a number of years been president of a boys' club, advanced his model of what he understood to be a "New Aristocracy of Comradeship". In *Shop Slavery and Emancipation: A Revolutionary Appeal to the*

⁴⁸ Bristow, *Empire Boys*, p. 174.

⁴⁹ K.M.L. [i.e. Kenneth Lindsay], 'An Appeal to the Universities', in *The Boy*, 4 (1) (September 1925), p. 11.

Educated Young Men of the Middle Class (1912) he called, like Ashbee, for the reorganisation of the workplace and the formation of "a new class" based upon "the reckless love of comrades". If Ashbee's description appears to anticipate Wilde's courtroom speech, Paine's seems eerily to echo it:

By the reckless love of comrades I mean love, of a defensive or of an offensive kind, as it may exist between two young men of equal age, who, in the first warm generous feelings of youth, are prepared to act with a fine disregard of consequences in standing loyally by each other; and love, of a protective kind, as it may exist between a man and a youth, where the younger sees in the older a model of all the manly virtues he aspires to imitate, and the older sees in the younger a freshly written manuscript of his own youth, into which he may read all his earlier dreams and come to realise them in the person of another.⁵⁰

Paine envisages the formation of a "militant union" (69) of comrades, and urges his readers to join him in recruiting for the New Aristocracy:

We have a clearly defined aim. With us it is a question of establishing a new ideal of personal relationship, and inspiring the whole of the youth of the nation with the same spirit.

The means are everywhere at hand for capturing the young. If you wish to set about it in a private way, you cannot do better than begin with the first impressionable boy or youth that you come across in your own class as apprentice or improver. (109-10)

He advises operating via "the Scouts and the Territorials, or failing these, make a dead-set for working-class boys' clubs" (110). In a manner Galton would doubtless have approved, Paine envisages the New Aristocracy as drawing on the best of all classes; as revealed by his second book, *A New Aristocracy of Comradeship* (1920; but written, at least in part, in 1912), he proposes dismantling the old class system only to found a new elite, constituted of "the picked men of every class". For all boys, he maintains,

are born aristocrats. We have to keep them so. We must take them away from their parents. We must take them away from themselves. They shall belong to us, they shall be children of the New Aristocracy of Comradeship.⁵¹

⁵⁰ William Paine, *Shop Slavery and Emancipation: A Revolutionary Appeal to the Educated Young Men of the Middle Class* (London, 1912), p. 107. Further references will be included in the text.

⁵¹ William Paine, *A New Aristocracy of Comradeship* (London, 1920), pp. 65-6.

Paine's revolutionary vision was clearly homocentric, and his interest in working-class youths may have been homoerotic; certainly his recruitment plan seems, at times, to involve a seduction that is more than simply ideological: "You will, of course," he cautions the boys' club patron in *Shop Slavery*, "disguise your hand so carefully that no one in authority will suspect your motive. You must appear to have no motive; and, indeed, there is no reason why you should come into collision with anyone. You will introduce wrestling, boxing, swimming" - also all-male hostels: "*chummeries* I believe they are called in America" (111). But though his model forbids *heterosexual* dalliance, it also resists identification as *homosexual*: "chastity persevered in as a means to an end", he points out, "may be a noble thing [...] *the comradeship I urge must be a spiritual one*" (117). This does not necessarily bring Paine's vision into line with hegemonic models; it is in his emphasis upon celibacy, of course, that he parts company with Galton, the scientist of reproduction for whom male patronage was designed to bring men into temporary, not permanent, and certainly not *exclusive*, partnership. Paine's writings are best understood as invocations of that paiderastic discourse in which male bonds - virile, lasting and superlative - are forged not at the behest of the sexually aberrant body, but in an attempt to realise an alternative cultural model. The emphasis upon gender separatism was, indeed, a particularly radical one in an era in which the boundaries between the 'separate spheres' of masculine and feminine were being broken down or reconceptualised as unhealthy,⁵² and in which even homosexuality itself - at least when understood in terms of inversion - was assimilable to the 'hetero' paradigm. Paine revalorises the separate spheres as the site, if not of eroticism, then certainly of romance. He even proposes a female version of the New Aristocracy: "an Order of Social Comrades for women", in which ladies of the middle classes become the patrons of working-class girls.⁵³ He advises encouraging these girls, however, to make early marriages - with, presumably, those men who failed to make the ranks of the chaste male Aristocracy. Female comradeship, as in Carpenter's writings, emerges here as a pale and implicitly inferior imitation of a masculine paradigm.

⁵² For details of turn-of-the-century hostility towards (women's) separatist activity, see Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies* (London, 1985). Even the most progressive of the period's social commentators were suspicious of separatism: see, for example, F. W. Stella Browne's, *Sexual Variety and Variability Among Women* (London, 1917).

⁵³ Paine, *A New Aristocracy*, p. 109.

Paine's vision clearly occupies a suggestive space mid-way between the literature of boy-welfare and that of boy-love. Hegemonic and homoerotic interests are, indeed, often hard to disentangle in the paedocentric discourse of the period. James Butterworth's *Byways in Boyland* (1925), for example, sounds like it might rank alongside Francis Murray's *Rondeaux of Boyhood* (1923) and John Barford's *Ladslove Lyrics* (1918) as a classic of 'Uranian' literature; even its subtitle - *Pages from a Down-Town Parson's Note-Book* - fails to forbid its inclusion in the genre, since many Uranian poets were, as we've seen, clergymen. However, though the book even addresses itself to "lovers of boys", it is primarily a manual for those involved in youth movements and not, ultimately, a Boy-Love text - though many Boy-Lovers doubtless appreciated Butterworth's affectionate anecdotes of working-class juvenility.

This blurring at the semantic edges was the natural feature of a literature which, as we've seen, had intimate links with so many dominant discourses, and facilitated rather than hindered the dissemination of paiderastic ideology. Edward Stevenson's *White Cockades* (1887) is a prime example of a text in which a homosexual author (Stevenson would go on, as 'Xavier Mayne', to publish the pioneering gay novel *Imre: A Memorandum* [1908] and, of course, *The Intersexes*) invokes hegemonic conventions only, ultimately, to transgress them. Set in Scotland at the time of the Jacobite Rebellion, *White Cockades* is a juvenile novel in the 'Boy's Own' tradition. Its sixteen year-old hero, the aptly-named Andrew Boyd (i.e. 'Manly' Boy[d]), shelters the runaway Bonnie Prince Charlie in his father's house and, ultimately, helps him to safety. His patriotism and courage inspire the Prince first to admire, later to love him; when Andrew's father is fatally wounded by English soldiers, he readily agrees to the dying man's request that he take care of his son:

'I swear it,' replied Prince Charles, solemnly, taking the sobbing Andrew's hand again in his own. 'I call these about us to my witness. Whither I go, shall he go; and where I lodge, shall he lodge.'⁵⁴

Charles' affection for Andrew recalls the love of Jonathan for David, but his words echo

⁵⁴ Edward Irenæus Stevenson, *White Cockades: An Incident of the "Forty-Five"* (London, 1887), p. 210. Further references will be included in the text.

and invert those of another famous Old Testament same-sex lover - Ruth. Stevenson is claiming historical precedent for his homoerotic romance, and compounding the tradition by making his own elaborations in the interstices of established historical narrative. The novel's final chapter invokes the standard account of the Prince's subsequent adventures as a political exile, but adds:

But history, which seldom has space for such trifles, does not state that ever at the Prince's side, upon sea or land, from the hour of his departure from Glenmoriston and its outlaws, there was a Highland lad, toward whom the exile showed a quiet care and affection, never for an instant relaxed, and of a sort that won the notice of all who encountered them. Little was said of his antecedents or his story. The Prince desired no questions upon the matter; but he and his gallant looking *protégé* seemed inseparable even in private. (214)

Though the grown-up Andrew ultimately returns to his Scottish home with "a fair French bride" (215), the shadowy world of heterosexual romance, gestured towards only in the novel's last few lines, is left unexplored. Like so much of the schoolboy fiction of the period, *White Cockades* is dominated by men and boys and fascinated by the bonds between them. As Bristow notes, the classic juvenile adventure stories of a novelist like G. A. Henty placed their "valiant boy heroes [...] in the lauded company of the bold and the brave"; their very titles reflect the process which interpellated the boy reader into the imperial-patriarchal plot: *With Clive in India* (1884), *With Roberts to Pretoria* (1902), *With Kitchener in the Soudan* (1903).⁵⁵ For Stevenson, however, as for many homosexuals of the period, the resonance of the patron/protégé paradigm clearly exceeded the bounds of the Boy's Own model with which it was nevertheless so compatible (and he himself would identify the homoerotic content of the novel by invoking it as an example of similisexual literature in *The Intersexes*⁵⁶). The paradigm invoked when Andrew, via the swearing of solemn oaths, is moved from his father's care to that of an older lover, is, of course, classically paiderastic. Paiderastia, Stevenson implies, is an ancient institution available for reconstruction in any era - including, crucially, the modern boy reader's own.

⁵⁵ Bristow, *Empire Boys*, p. 147.

⁵⁶ Mayne, *The Intersexes*, p. 368.

'Eros is up and away, away!': the poetry of E. E. Bradford

The proffering of paiderastia as a contemporary model - implicit in Stevenson's text - is often spectacularly overt in self-identified Boy-Love literature. Though 'A Schoolmaster' (Arnold Smith, headmaster of Battersea Polytechnic Secondary School⁵⁷) fantasises in *A Boy's Absence* (1919) that he and his beloved youth have been comrades in a previous, Roman incarnation - when "I bore/ The eagle of the legion, and you wore/ A sweet, short tunic"⁵⁸ - most Boy-Lovers propose British paiderastia as an improvement on the classical original. In this, they engage directly with the paiderastic visions of writers like Kains Jackson and Paine; in the Boy-Love poetry of E. E. Bradford, indeed, New Chivalry and New Aristocracy are both explicitly invoked. *The True Aristocracy* (1923) follows the fortunes of Edward Neville from his passionate childhood friendship with two boys, Clare and Clifford, to his graduation from Oxford and subsequent ordination. Like Peter Pan, the homosocial hero who preoccupied James Barrie throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century, Neville resolves to stay a 'boy' forever: to remain unmarried, to pursue male friendships rather than to court women. He ultimately finds a romantic friend in the form of the working-class youth, Dick, and recalls him - as Maurice recalls Scudder, in Forster's unpublished (at this time) novel - from the brink of emigration. It is in boys such as Dick, and in men like Neville who realise and encourage their latent, noble potential, that Bradford locates the New, *True* Aristocracy; more directly than Paine's, his work challenges eugenicist values even while it reinvokes eugenicist millenarianism:

In future aristocracy
Will not depend on pedigree;
Wealth will not win gentility,
Nor title-deeds nobility.
Nor will the chief in honour be
The founder of a family,
But rather he whose heart is free
To love and serve humanity.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ D'Arch Smith, *Love in Earnest*, p. 150.

⁵⁸ A Schoolmaster [Arnold W. Smith], *A Boy's Absence* (London, 1919), p. 9.

⁵⁹ Rev. E. E. Bradford, 'The Great and the Chief', in *The True Aristocracy* (London, 1923), p. 8.

Just as *The True Aristocracy* celebrates Paine's patronage model, so the title poem of *The New Chivalry and Other Poems* (1918) elaborates upon the argument of Kains Jackson's 1894 essay. According to the poem the procreative imperative is not only no longer desirable, but a positive threat to the health of the nation, and should, like a poisonous upas tree, be hacked down. The poem reads as if delivered from a pulpit - Bradford was, after all, a clergyman - but drastically revises Biblical injunction as it is commonly interpreted:

This Upas tree is old has mighty roots
 In Bible, Church and State - or so 'tis said,
 But Christ would have us judge it by its fruits:
 These are abundant, purple, white and red -
 Disease and want and war. 'Tis time 'twere dead:
 Go hew it down, it cumbereth the ground.
 Marriage is meet, and undefiled the bed,
 But 'tis not obligatory. None are bound,
 On penalty of sin, a family to found.

Nay, single life is full as virtuous,
 And comrades' fellowship as pure and high.
 Beauty and love are not forbidden us
 Because for women we have ceased to sigh.
 Passion must be refined, but need not die.
 The cult of youth ideal will tend to be
 For more and more, the source of Poetry,
 Romance and Chivalry. Cut down the tree!
 Leave Prejudice for Truth, and Truth shall make You free.⁶⁰

The truth is that, though "pious folk/ Ignore it, and scarce dare to breathe its name,/ There is a tree more ancient": the tree of paiderastia, which offers a hallowed shelter to sympathetic men and boys, here romantically recast as the Knights and Squires of the New Chivalry (26-8).⁶¹

Bradford's reclamation of an ancient tradition for contemporary Englishmen involved, as so many historical fictions do, the reimagining of history for a modern agenda. *Passing the Love of Women* (1913) combines Boy-Love poems set in the present - 'Rudolf', 'Eric', 'Alan' - with complementary stories from myth and classical history. 'To Narcissus' is frankly approving of the youth's homoerotic self-regard:

⁶⁰ Bradford, *The New Chivalry*, pp. 25-6. Further references to this volume will be included in the text.

⁶¹ For more on the homosexual appropriation of chivalry, see Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire* (Chapel Hill, 1990), chapter 8.

You ne'er have met your mate as yet
 Among the maids who smirk and smile?
None seem to you both sweet and true?
 Well, you are wise to wait awhile:
For you are young, Narcissus, young
 And fair: far fairer than the few
Fair women foolish bards have sung:
 Then wherefore would you women woo?⁶²

In ‘Jupiter and Ganymede’ the king of the gods turns for comfort to the beautiful mortal boy Ganymede principally because he is weary of his shrewish wife Juno and his coquettish cup-bearer Hebe ("female to the finger tips" [73], she is ousted from her position when Ganymede is assumed into Heaven). Similarly Apollo, in ‘Apollo and Hyacinthus’, experiences in the arms of the beautiful prince the "higher love" (92) he has always longed for and never found with a female partner. Such stories reflect the paiderastic customs of the cultures to which they spoke originally and most directly; Bradford and other poets subtly recast them as parables of modern Boy-Love with all its specific pleasures and anxieties. And, as we’ve seen (and as the title of Bradford’s volume attests), paiderastic paradigms could be inferred from the Bible, as well as the classics. Hence ‘Philebus’ 1918 ‘Whom Jesus Loved’, too long to quote in its extraordinary entirety here, which wheedles the secrets of his paiderastic relationship with Christ from an infantilised Apostle John:

Were things as difficult with you as now?
You were the younger, weren't you? Tell me how
 You met Him. Did his eyes so soft and sad
 Attract you, lad?

.....

And did He recognise His image, you, in truth,
And revel in the radiance of your youth?
 And was it not a comfort when you came,
 Devoid of shame,

And held, for all the world to see, His hand
And whispered, ‘Those poor chaps don't understand
 I am your friend; you mine. I love you, see.

⁶² Rev. E. E. Bradford, *Pas^sing the Love of Women and Other Poems* (London, 1913), p. 50. Further references will be included in the text.

Say you love me.⁶³

But the real radicalism of Boy-Love poetry lay, as I have suggested, not in its reinterpretation of history and myth, but in its programme for contemporary social change. In 'To My Book', the poem which prefaces Bradford's 1916 *Lays of Love and Life*, this programme is made explicit and its ultimate success confidently predicted:

Go, little book, and cry:
Though few at first may heed thee,
Ten thousand by and by
Will gather round and read thee.

Lift up thy voice on high,
Hold thou thy peace for no man;
Protest against the lie
That love's mere lust for woman.⁶⁴

Bradford was remarkably adept at monopolising established homocentric discourse; in 'The Call', the poem prefacing *The New Chivalry*, his utopian agenda is reiterated in a specifically wartime idiom:

Eros is up and away, away!
Eros is up and away!
The son of Urania born of the sea,
The lover of lads and liberty.
Strong, self-controlled, erect and free,
He is marching along to-day!

He is calling aloud to the men, the men!
He is calling aloud to the men -
'Turn away from the wench, with her powder and paint,
And follow the Boy, who is fair as a saint.'
And the heart of the lover, long fevered and faint,
Beats bravely and boldly again. (5)

The virile signifiers here - *lads*, *liberty*, *erect*, *marching*, *bravely* and *boldly* - were also, in 1918, culturally over-invested ones. The First World War was, of course, a particularly traumatic era for Boy-Lovers, and lent an extra poignancy to their melancholy meditations

⁶³ Philebus [pseud. John Leslie Barford], 'Whom Jesus Loved', *Ladslove Lyrics* (Edinburgh, 1918), pp. 34-5. A later stanza sees Jesus rubbing John down after a "scamper on the shores of Galilee".

⁶⁴ Rev. E. E. Bradford, *Lays of Love and Life* (London, 1916), p. 5.

on the brevity of youth.⁶⁵ 'The Call', however, reappropriates the rhetoric of patriotism for paiderastic discourse, and redefines the young man's struggle. Just as *Lays of Love and Life* had been offered as a 'call' to the sensitive male ear, a call heralding the birth of a new society, so Eros is imaged here as a kind of master *erastes*, inspiring in his young male audience allegiance to the homophile nation to which, Bradford suggests, they more properly belong.

Indeed, the paiderastic paradigm into which Bradford was attempting to redirect patriotic fervour was being cultivated just as strenuously at this time by Britain's enemy. James Steakley, in *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany*, details the rise of the *Gemeinschaft der Eigenen* - the 'Community of the Special' - which was established in Germany in 1902 with the aim of promoting a paiderastic cultural revolution. Ten years after the appearance of Kains Jackson's essay Benedict Friedländer, one of the Community's founders, published his *Renaissance des Eros Uranios* (1904), in which he, too, called for "the revival of Hellenic chivalry".⁶⁶ His utopian vision was similarly androcentric; feminism was one of the issues over which the deeply misogynist, all male Community clashed with the more liberal, gender-integrationist Scientific Humanitarian Committee (headed, of course, by Magnus Hirschfeld). The Community's virile, separatist vision proved, ultimately and tragically, to be more commensurable than the Committee's reformism with growing trends in German political ideology: Hirschfeld's pioneer Institute for Sexual Science was raided on Nazi orders in 1933, and its irreplaceable sexological archives destroyed.

Like the Community of the Special, Bradford and Boy-Love poets in general maintained a critical distance on the homosexual model which sexologists and reformers were making an increasingly definitive one (Bradford's rare "womanish" characters - Zephyrus, for example, Hyacinthus' base suitor in 'Apollo and Hyacinthus' - are significantly villainous). As we've seen, paiderastic discourse frequently overlapped with more mainstream expressions of male *philia*. Despite the obvious eroticism of his interest in young men, Bradford's model was, ostensibly, chaste: "boys need love," he wrote in 'The New Chivalry', "but not the love of woman:/ Romantic friendship, passionate but

⁶⁵ See, for example, 'The Slacker', in Leonard Green's *Dream Comrades and Other Prose Sketches* (Oxford, 1916).

⁶⁶ James D. Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany* (New York, 1975), p. 43.

pure,/ Should be their first-love" (27). It was also, theoretically, temporary: amongst the 'Knights and Squires', for example, the latter are free to answer the call of "woman", should they hear it. But such a model clearly begs the question of the erotic identity of the Knights or older men - with whom Bradford certainly identified - which seems to remain fixed, exclusive, endlessly 'inspiring'. His ambition was, after all, like Paine's and like that of many of the Boy-Love poets, the widening of comradely ranks, the *promotion* of homoerotic bonding; it was here that the gulf between Boy-Love and sexology was at its widest. Cottam, in *Cameos of Boyhood*, seeks "To ope" a "sweet earthly paradise [...] for every willing man and boy" (7). Philebus, in *Ladslove Lyrics*, entreats a maturing youth to keep "one small plot/ In the vast garden of your warm young heart, [...] Sown with My Love": "Then will the seed I sowed there bear a glorious bloom - / The hardy flower of Manlove, heaven-blest and pure".⁶⁷ Bradford, in the prefacing poem to *The True Aristocracy*, invites the (implicitly male) reader to enter, or re-enter, the homosocial realm, and never leave it:

Noble Reader, art thou chief?
Thee from Eden naught can sever!
Come not for a season brief,
But abide with us for ever.⁶⁸

Paiderastia clearly requires that boys not only receive "precious knowledge", but retain the privileges of that wisdom by transmitting it in their turn. While sexologists sought a model of homosexuality in which gender and sexual object-choice tallied - in which men who loved men were 'really' feminine (had a woman's soul, an excess of female "germs", hormones etc), women who desired women mannish and/or sterile - male separatists like Bradford challenged understandings of the link between sexuality and gender. As feminists have, at various times but especially in the 1960s and '70s, when the term was coined, become 'political lesbians', so, for Boy-Lovers, homophile identification was a matter of choice rather than of biological compulsion, and constituted a deeply romantic, possibly - but not necessarily - erotic, resistance of heterosexual imperatives. Their vision of male bonding, inspired by the paiderastic model, was of a

⁶⁷ 'Philebus', 'At Paddington, August the Third', in *Ladslove Lyrics*, pp. 27-8.

⁶⁸ Bradford, 'Prologue', in *The True Aristocracy*, p. vii.

virile continuum some men moved *within* and others moved *out of*, but *into* which all men had the potential to move *and remain*.

Whether it took the form of Comrade-Love, Boy-Love or 'Manlove', then, 'paiderastia' was, in the early twentieth century, a related but ultimately quite distinct phenomena to 'homosexuality', a condition understood primarily in inverted or 'intermediate' terms. "There is no hereditary race of boy-lovers," wrote Arthur Lyon Raile (Edward Warren) in his 1928 *A Defence of Uranian Love*, "as in Roman Catholic countries there is no hereditary priesthood. The easy development of boy-love to its best depends on the character of a community, and on the worship of its communion, as the priesthood depends on the religion of the people".⁶⁹ Raile presents Boy-Love not as the "disease" that the modern world thinks it to be, but as a refined "dis-ease" with that very world and its heterosexual conventions (35); the "lover of the male", he claims, " - the excellent lover of the male - is one who has concentrated all his enthusiasms, religious, philosophical, ethical, æsthetic, on certain qualities. These qualities, not easy of attainment, and scantily appreciated by the vulgar, are the flower of manhood" (36).

Raile's *Defence* offers itself both as a paiderastic source-book, and as a kind of conduct-book for the conscientious Boy-Lover; but it is to a very different homosexual advice manual that I want, finally, to draw attention - a text which, like Ellis' *Sexual Inversion*, dramatises the defeat of paiderastia in its competition with more hegemonic homosexual discourses. *The Invert* (1927) was almost exactly contemporary with Raile's volume, and was published, like the *Defence*, under a pseudonym. 'Anomaly' - its self-confessedly inverted author - draws on a tradition of sympathetic sexological commentary made popular, perhaps, by Ellis' volume; he seeks to educate the heterosexual reader towards tolerance of the homosexual condition, and to empower the inverted reader only in the sense of easing his passage through a hostile world. "Don't commit to writing any admissions as to your inclinations", begins one memorable cautionary passage; "don't masquerade - on any occasion whatsoever - in women's clothes, take female parts in theatrical performances, or use make-up; [...] don't wear conspicuous rings, watches, cuff-links, or other jewellery; [...] don't stand with your hand on your hip, or walk

⁶⁹ Arthur Lyon Raile [pseud. Edward Perry Warren], *A Defence of Uranian Love*, Volume 1: 'The Boy-Lover' (London, 1928), p. 21. Further references will be included in the text.

mincingly; [...] don't become involved in marked intimacies with men who are not of your own age or set; don't let your enthusiasm for particular male friends make you conspicuous in their eyes, or in the eyes of society".⁷⁰ The furtive, inverted advisees imagined by Anomaly are very different to those virile, 'excellent lovers of the male' addressed by Raile; although one, not inconsiderable, effect of *The Invert* is to alert us to the limits of paiderastia's appeal for the 'effeminate' homosexual men to whom sexology had always, at least, offered a forum, the volume reminds us that the pose in which a dominantly heterosexual society prefers to maintain its male lovers is a self-contained but also self-policing one.

There is thus no room for paiderastic optimism in Anomaly's text; indeed, the text defines itself in contradistinction to the subversive alternative discourses of Boy- and Comrade Love, as Robert Thouless' Introduction to the book makes clear. Thouless, a psychology lecturer at the University of Glasgow and "normally sexed" (xxiii), recommends Anomaly's cautionary study both for the genuine "adolescent invert", and for the young man for whom homosexual desire will be a phase, or symptom of an essential bisexuality which can easily be trained to run along heterosexual lines. For the bisexual youth, writes Thouless,

[e]verything is undesirable [...] which tends to delay normality. Passionate companionship with men is certainly one such influence. The sentimental literature which glorifies homosexual love under the name of "Urningism" is another. The true invert may gain new courage by realisation of the number of great men who have been inverts; the bisexual needs to be reminded [...] that there is no necessary association between greatness and inversion. (xx-xxi)

Here, the very distinction between 'true' (inverted) and 'temporary' (confused) homosexuality which paiderastic commentators were committed to dismantling is reinforced; paiderastic literature is itself disparaged; and passionate male bonding is redefined as unhealthy. Thouless' anxiety about homosexual models (Anomaly, he feels, "skilfully steers a middle course between the popular reprobation of inversion and 'urning' sentimentality" [xii]) is a testimony to the subversive energy of paiderastic discourse - but also signals its defeat at the hands of more orthodox commentators. Raile's

⁷⁰ Anomaly, *The Invert and His Social Adjustment* (London, 1927) pp. 135-6. Further references will be included in the text.

Defence of Uranian Love proved, indeed, to be one of the last great literary flowerings of the Boy-Love movement; as we shall see in later chapters, inversion theories, assimilated into the popularised psychology of the 1930s, would re-emerge in the post-war period in subtly new and persuasive forms (Anomaly himself would be persuaded to reissue *The Invert*, with a lengthy 'Sequel', in 1948). Changes in homosexual definition would demand that history be interpreted in new, often conservative, ways; paiderastic discourse itself would appeal, increasingly, to lesbian writers - but would never again be invoked by homosexual men in so organised a manner, and with such bravado.

CHAPTER 3

‘The Most Famous Fairy in History’: Antinous and Homosexual Fantasy

If the emergence of new sexual discourses in the latter part of the nineteenth century facilitated a reinterpretation and reclamation of ancient cultural systems like *paiderastia*, it also demanded a reconsideration of certain, sexually transgressive, historical individuals. Out of the gallery of figures - Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Christina of Sweden and others - whose sexual identities became in this period a subject of speculation and debate, two individuals attracted particular notice. Sappho of Lesbos, the ancient Greek poet, and Antinous, handsome favourite of the Emperor Hadrian, had long figured in homosexual and anti-homosexual commentary as representative or even paradigmatic deviants; their reputations were compounded for the late nineteenth century, with its specific excitements and anxieties about sexual and gender transgression, by a new proliferation of fictions - indeed, they often figured at this time as *joint* icons of sexual deviance. Homosexual artist Simeon Solomon had hung pictures of Sappho and Antinous in his college rooms in the 1860s;¹ Rachilde's *Monsieur Venus* (1884) brought Antinous and Sappho together in a suggestive combination - as did other decadent texts of the period, most blatantly Luis d'Herdy's 1899 *Monsieur Antinoüs et Madame Sapho*, which depicts the marriage of convenience made by a mannish lesbian and an effeminate homosexual man.² As late as 1934, in Christina Stead's *The Salzburg Tales*, Sappho and

1 Joan de Jean, *Fictions of Sappho, 1546-1937* (Chicago and London, 1989), p. 225.

2 For more on Antinous' and Sappho's role in Decadent literature, see Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (Oxford, 1970).

Antinous would still be rubbing textual shoulders. By then, however, their reputations would be on the wane; today, Antinous (if not, quite, Sappho), along with the mass of turn-of-the-century literature he inspired, has been almost forgotten.

It is this literature that I want to recover and examine in this chapter, which explores and analyses Antinous' iconic status in both homosexual and non-homosexual writing; chapter 4 looks more exclusively at Sappho's place in lesbian writing of the same period. Antinous' role as a specifically homosexual icon, though frequently noted by literary historians, has rarely been considered at length;³ one useful critical model for my project here, however, has been James M. Saslow's *Ganymede in the Renaissance*, which looks at the changing representation of Ganymede in European visual art from the fifteenth century to the seventeenth. Ganymede, of course, was the beautiful Trojan shepherd-boy whom Zeus' eagle (or Zeus in the shape of an eagle) seized (or raped) and established, in Hebe's place, as cup-bearer to the gods. Saslow argues that, in a Renaissance culture which understood homosexuality primarily in terms of "relations between men and adolescent boys", Ganymede was a particularly suggestive icon - "the single most appropriate, if not the exclusive, symbol of male-male love".⁴ The representation of Ganymede's story - in which he might be idealised or caricatured, outraged at his own abduction or coyly complicit with it - involved all its artists in implicit or explicit homosexual commentary.

Antinous, I want to suggest, occupied a similar place in Victorian literary culture (indeed, Antinous' story as it was re-told was often haunted by that of Ganymede, their roles as the catamites of powerful men frequently, if not always overtly, compared). For if, by the nineteenth century, pederasty had lost its status as the exclusive mode of homosexual relations, then with the revived cultural ideal of *paiderastia* Antinous' story proved peculiarly compatible. But like Ganymede - and, as we shall see, like Sappho - the enigmatic Antinous attracted the attention of a wide range of fiction writers and

3 The fullest study (not, however, in English) can probably be found in Jorge de Sena's Introduction to Fernando Pessoa, *Poemas Ingleses* (Lisboa, 1974), pp. 49-70.

4 James M. Saslow, *Ganymede in the Renaissance: Homosexuality in Art and Society* (New Haven and London, 1986), p. 7.

scholars: homosexual men, heterosexual men and women, and lesbians. His status as the sexual favourite of Hadrian made him a magnet for homosexual fantasy in particular, and forced all his commentators to engage with (homo)sexual debate. He thus figured at the turn of the century as a particularly sensitive register of homosexual desire and cultural anxiety.

The homosexual favourite

Like Sappho, Antinous - the "Emperor Hadrian's minion and the slave of his unlawful pleasures", as St. Athanasius called him in AD 350 - has emerged from the ancient world surrounded by scandal and contention.⁵ Rather more is known for certain about him than about the elusive and mythologised poet of Lesbos, but his life and, particularly, his death are still shrouded in mystery. He was born around AD 110 in the Greek province of Bithynia, an area at the base of the Black Sea which had, since the first century BC, been subject to Roman occupation and rule. His background seems to have been respectable: far from aristocratic, but certainly not as lowly as that imagined by the many writers who have presented him as a shepherd or even as a slave. (As we shall see, the myth of Antinous' humble origins played a significant role in homosexual and anti-homosexual commentary alike.) But the young Antinous was clearly remarkably beautiful; by 128 he had attracted Hadrian's attention, been removed from his Greek homeland and installed in the imperial court as the Emperor's favourite. He accompanied Hadrian on a variety of imperial tours, and was prominently displayed; on a journey to Egypt in 130, however, he met his death, by drowning. The details of this event are vague, and have consequently provoked much speculation. His untimely demise is generally supposed to have been engineered for sacrificial purposes (though historians have argued over the

⁵ Quoted in Royston Lambert, *Beloved and God: the Story of Hadrian and Antinous* (London, 1984), p. 7. Lambert gives what is the most comprehensive and up-to-date - though still, at times, rather speculative - account of Antinous, Hadrian and the Roman background, and I have relied on his study here.

extent of Hadrian's involvement in it); since it coincided with both the festival of the Nile and the feast of Osiris (an Egyptian god who, like Dionysus, was believed ritually to die and rise again) it does indeed seem as if Antinous' death was a form of voluntary sacrifice - possibly an attempt to extend the life of Hadrian, who was, at this time, ailing.

Whatever the Emperor's role in Antinous' death, his grief after it was considerable. He wept, in public, "like a woman";⁶ he caused a new city, Antinoöpolis or Antinoë, to be raised at the site of Antinous' immolation, and a new star to be named after him; he granted Antinous divine status, and fostered the cult that subsequently sprang up around him. Most importantly perhaps for later generations, he commissioned or inspired the manufacture of the vast number of statues, friezes and coins by which Antinous' form has become familiar to the modern world. These likenesses were excessive in number in Hadrian's era and proliferate even today. They depict Antinous in a variety of poses and guises of the Greek, Roman and Egyptian traditions: as Dionysus or Hermes, for example, Osiris or Sylvanus. Many of them, however, favour a distinct 'look' - a broad, swelling chest, a head of tousled curls, a downcast gaze - which allows them to be instantly recognised; and it is in the particular guise of melancholy, languorous and introspective ephebe that Hadrian's favourite has been most often remembered (see figure 1). These statues, commissioned after Antinous' death and in response to it, have frequently dictated the terms upon which modern writers have interpreted his life.

Antinous' youth and beauty, and the romantic circumstances of his life and death, have made him the object of homosexual attention since at least the eighteenth century. Frederick the Great was amongst those nobles who vied for possession of the Antinous likenesses unearthed at Hadrian's villa;⁷ Gray and Walpole, making what G. S. Rousseau has identified as the homosocial Grand Tour, collected figures of Antinous, amongst other antiquities, on their trips around Italy in the 1730s.⁸ Rousseau also notes the "cult of

6 Quoted from the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* by Lambert, *Beloved*, p. 143.

7 Lambert, *Beloved*, p. 9.

8 G. S. Rousseau, *Perilous Enlightenment: pre- and post-modern discourses, sexual, historical* (Manchester and New York, 1991), p. 178. Further page references to Rousseau, where obvious, will be included in the text.



Figure 1: Antinous Bas-Relief (Villa Albani)



Figure 2: Anton Maron (1733-1808), Portrait of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (Kunstsammlungen zu Weimar)

Antinous" that was pursued, mid-century, by the men who gathered at the Roman villa of Cardinal Albani (28); the Cardinal's famous bas-relief of Antinous in the guise of Vertumnus was especially admired by Winckelmann, who had himself painted holding a reproduction of it (figure 2). By the second half of the nineteenth century Antinous had a prominent role as part of the historical capital of the newly-vocal homosexual subculture. In Germany - where the input of homosexual scholarship into the neoclassical revival remained, after Winckelmann, considerable - interest in Hadrian's favourite flourished: Antinous-based texts of the period include Paul Heyse's tragedy *Hadrian* (1865), Oscar Linke's *Antinous, des Kaisers Liebling* of 1888 and Eugen Stangen's volume of poetry *Antinouslieder* (1903).⁹

As we saw in chapter 1, Antinous' name appears alongside those of Hylas, Ganymede and Adonis in the homoerotic canons that were beginning to be drawn up by writers in English like Raffalovich and Wilde. The association of Antinous with other homoerotic heroes was not new (the obvious comparison with Hylas and Narcissus, both of whom met similarly watery deaths, had been made in Hadrian's own day¹⁰); but what *was* new was the breadth and self-consciousness of the subculture which now claimed Antinous as a particular icon. To pursue the figure of Antinous through *fin-de-siècle* literature is to tread the unmistakable but sometimes narrow and circuitous path of homosexual signification. He is celebrated in an 1865 pamphlet by 'Numa Numantius' - the pioneer homosexual campaigner, Ulrichs.¹¹ He is addressed by Symonds, characteristically, in two distinct discourses - the scholarly and the poetic - in the 1870s;¹² he appears - almost - in the drama planned by Symonds' friend and fellow homosexual Edmund Gosse in the same decade, and in the "romance" conceived by Nicholas Crabbe, the hero of Rolfe's *The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole*, thirty years

9 Robert Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean* (London and New York, 1993), p. 113. (Aldrich, however, mistakenly dates Heyse's play to 1895.)

10 Lambert, *Beloved*, p. 129.

11 Numa Numantius [pseud. Karl Heinrich Ulrichs], 'Antinous', in *Ara Spei* (Leipzig, 1865).

12 John Addington Symonds, 'Antinous', in *Sketches and Studies in Italy* (London, 1879), and 'The Lotos-Garland of Antinous', in *Many Moods* (London, 1878).

later.¹³ He is on sale to interested readers of *The Artist* in 1893, in the form of a "cast statue" for £3 10s; his beautiful profile is resurrected and his tragic fate replayed by the homosexual lovers of the underground homosexual romance *Teleny*, of the same year.¹⁴ He positively haunts Wilde's work. He appears, for example, with his "ivory body" and "pomegranate mouth", as one of the "improbable rhymes" (with 'odorous') in the exotic fantasy 'The Sphinx' (1894);¹⁵ and it is to his "marble brow" that the 'Young King' is observed, in secret, pressing his "warm lips", just as he is seen gazing at "a Greek gem carved with the figure of Adonis", and at the play of moonlight on "a silver image of Endymion".¹⁶

Each of these Antinouses beckons us into the late Victorian homosexual subculture; yet, like the statues of the Bithynian youth himself, each is subtly different, the product of different sexual and historiographical agendas. I shall be identifying at least three main guises - far, of course, from mutually exclusive - in which homosexual writers sought to establish Antinous; these are, the Greek Lover, the decadent *objet*, and the transhistorical icon. To readers of chapter 1, these figures may seem familiar: the course of Antinous' *fin-de-siècle* homosexual career was determined by, and thus reflects, the broader itinerary of the homosexual retrospection of the period.

It also reflects *anxiety* about that retrospection: for writers working outside the homosexual coterie, Antinous' fate in the work of paiderastic and decadent authors seemed a disturbing replication of his treatment at the hands of a corrupt emperor; their Antinous fictions, which this chapter also examines, may be read as warning commentaries upon the increasing audacity of the homosexual subculture itself. The chapter, then, while a survey, is only broadly chronological; my concern has been to

13 Symonds refers to the projected play in a letter to Gosse of February, 1878: see Herbert M. Schueller and Robert L. Peters (eds.), *The Letters of John Addington Symonds, Volume II: 1869-1884* (Detroit, 1968), p. 523. Frederick Rolfe [Baron Corvo], *The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole* (Oxford, 1985; written 1909, first published 1934), p. 41.

14 *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture*, 1 February 1893, p. 33; [Oscar Wilde and others], *Teleny, or the Reverse of the Medal* (London, 1986; first published 1893).

15 Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Aldershot, 1987), p. 45.

16 Oscar Wilde, *Complete Shorter Fiction* (Oxford, 1980), p. 173. 'The Young King' first appeared in *A House of Pomegranates* in 1891.

tease out and follow the range of narrative strands which made up Antinous' tangled turn-of-the-century biography.

Antinous and Greek Love

Ganymede, Adonis, Hyacinth, Narcissus, Hylas, Antinous: the homoerotic resonance of this classical pantheon from Raffalovich's 1886 'Ganymede of Ida' (see chapter 1) works to obscure the misidentification involved in placing a figure from Roman history alongside the heroes of Greek mythology. Despite the fact that he was born 400 years after the death of Charmides (with whom Wilde compares him in *The Portrait of Mr W.H.*), and 200 years after the annexation of the Greek Empire by the Roman, to many commentators Antinous seemed *classically* Greek; and a certain amount of ambiguity, even confusion, around the exact nature of his historical status manifests itself in modern Antinous fictions. We can interpret this (often wilful) misreading as a reflection of the absences, the indeterminacies, in his story - which, as we shall see, certainly allowed him to be reconstructed in a variety of guises. More importantly, I think, it reflects the one aspect of Antinous' life of which, paradoxically, we can be fairly sure: his status as the paiderastic beloved of a philhellene Emperor.

Hadrian's passion for all things Greek was famous, even notorious, among his Roman contemporaries. In his younger days he had been known as *Graeculus*, 'the Greekling'; as an Imperial ruler he encouraged study of the classical philosophers and, at the Villa Adriani, surrounded himself with Greek artefacts. His relationship with Antinous was certainly sanctioned by Roman custom; but it seems likely that he fostered an identification of Antinous as a Greek *eromenos*, and of himself as a complementary *erastes*, in emulation of a cherished classical model. Whatever Hadrian's personal motivations, this was certainly the interpretation put on his affair with Antinous in the nineteenth century: for homosexuals and non-homosexuals alike, Greek Love was the

point at which Antinous' story and modern sexual narratives intersected. Hadrian emerged from such an interpretation in uncanny emotional proximity to the Victorian homosexual Hellenist; Antinous remained in the role which the Emperor had, perhaps, engineered for him: that of the beautiful eromenos frozen at the moment of adolescent perfection, his decline into maturity permanently deferred.

Hadrian's desire for Antinous, in other words, provided the nineteenth-century Greek Lover not just with an historical precedent, but with a model for his own retrospective yearning. "Hellas, her art, her history, her myths, her literature, her lovers, her young heroes", wrote Symonds in his chapter on Antinous in *Sketches and Studies in Italy* (1879), "filled [Hadrian] with enthusiasm. To rebuild her ruined cities, to restore her deities, to revive her golden life of blended poetry and science, to reconstruct her spiritual empire as he had reorganised the Roman world, was Hadrian's dream".¹⁷ It is thus not quite in Antinous' body, but in its susceptibility to reconstruction by Hellenist fantasy, that Symonds locates the youth's appeal. "Was the link between him and Hadrian", he wonders, "formed less by the boy's beauty than by his marvellous capacity for apprehending and his fitness for realising the Emperor's Greek dreams? Did the spirit of Neoplatonism find in him congenial incarnation?" (65). These questions, he claims, "must be asked - for, without suggesting them, we leave the worship of Antinous an almost inexplicable scandal, an almost unintelligible blot on human nature" (66). Symonds seeks to rescue Antinous from calumny not by clearing his intimacy with the Emperor of homosexual content - as would other, less sympathetic, scholars¹⁸ - but, rather, by investing it with the glamour of the noble paiderastic tradition.

Indeed, Symonds begins his chapter by placing Antinous alongside a figure who, as we saw in chapter 1, was also becoming available for reinterpretation as a 'Neoplatonist'. "Visitors to picture and sculpture galleries", he claims, "are haunted by the forms of two handsome young men - Sebastian and Antinous. Both were saints: the one of decadent paganism, the other of mythologising Christianity" (47). Antinous'

¹⁷ Symonds, *Sketches*, p. 62. Further references will be included in the text.

¹⁸ For example, the Norwegian historian Lorentz Dietrichson who, with *Antinoos* (1884), endeavoured "to cleanse a noble and pure form from dirt". Quoted in Lambert, *Beloved*, p. 10.

proximity to the homoerotic icons of Christianity is something to which modern Antinous fictions return again and again. Hadrian's reign coincided with crucial developments in Western theological history; the similarity of Antinous to the self-sacrificial Christ was not, as Symonds notes, lost on early Christian commentators, who regarded the Antinous cult as a grotesque rival. "Educated as we have been in the traditions of the finally triumphant Christian faith, warmed through and through as we are by its summer glow and autumn splendour, [...] how can we comprehend a moment in its growth when the divinised Antinous was not merely an object offensive to the moral sense, but also a parody dangerous to the pure form of Christ?" (81-2). With such a statement Symonds appears to applaud the Christian hegemony - but the passage also reads as a lament for the loss of cultural and sexual pluralism which, privately, as we've seen, Symonds felt most keenly; more importantly, it takes the reader back to the beginnings of a fragile Christianity, and revives an alternative, implicitly homoerotic, tradition subsequently suppressed.

As we shall see, later homophile writers - Montague Summers, Fernando Pessoa - would return more boldly to the idea of an alternative faith; Symonds, characteristically, sought rather to make a homoerotic inflection of mainstream scholarship: though the volume has for its frontispiece a provocative reproduction of the 'Ildefonso Marble' (figure 3) - in which the shared caress of Antinous and the Genius of Hadrian overshadows a dwarfed, draped female figure¹⁹ - the Antinous essay constitutes only one of fifteen *Sketches and Studies* of, generally, more anodyne subjects ('Popular Italian Poetry of the Renaissance', 'Thoughts in Italy about Christmas'). Symonds' circumspection in such matters was far from gratuitous. As we saw in chapter 1, he believed that he had lost the Professorship of Poetry at Oxford as a result of the enthusiasm for Greek Love which had been allowed into the last chapter of his *Studies of the Greek Poets*. Over Antinous, damned by so many Christian commentators, there lay still a pall of censorship: R. S. Poole, the British Museum curator to whom Symonds

¹⁹ Symonds' is in fact a misidentification: the Ildefonso figures have more recently been named as the Greek heroes Castor and Pollux.

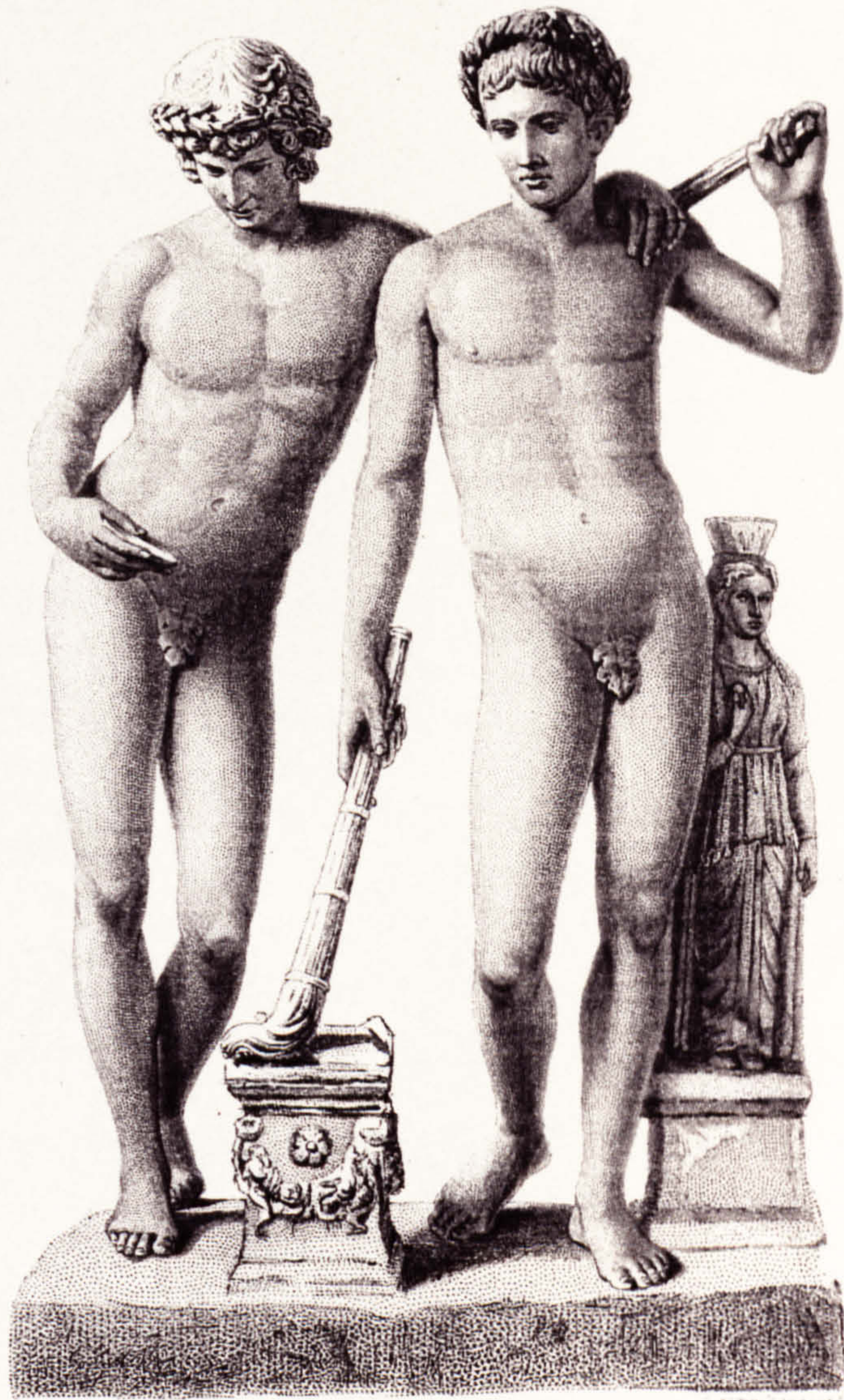


Figure 3: The 'Ildefonso Marbles'. Frontispiece to John Addington Symonds, *Sketches and Studies in Italy* (London, 1879)

applied for historical information, replied that "it was very courageous to ask even artistic questions about him".²⁰ It was partly in response to such hostility - an attempt to discover "[whether] the English will stand a poem on Antinous" - that Symonds included a slightly doctored version of 'The Lotos-Garland of Antinous' in his *Many Moods* of 1878.²¹ He had written this historical poem some years before, and had it privately and anonymously printed: together with 'Diego' it formed one of the pamphlets of homoerotic verse he circulated amongst sympathetic friends.²² In the poem Symonds attempts to penetrate the enigma of Antinous' death by reconstructing the moment of his suicide; the result was the establishment of Antinous in a new, influential homosexual pose.

The poem opens on a scene of Roman decadence: the Emperor (here, Adrian) and Antinous, his servant or slave, recline on a Nile barge, surrounded by flowers and by semi-naked boy and girl attendants. The moment is intensely visual - indeed, it is as a "vision" that Symonds introduces it - and recalls those opulent tableaux of the great Victorian historical painters, Leighton, Watts, and Alma-Tadema. More peculiar to Symonds, however, are the lingering descriptions of the body of Antinous:

a boy
 of nineteen summers, framed for power and joy.
 Crisp on his temples curled the coal-black hair:

 But oh! what tongue shall tell the orient glow
 Of those orbed breasts, smooth as dawn-smitten snow.²³

Here, as so often in Symonds' verse, erotic resonance derives less from individual signifiers than from the collisions - "tongue"/"breasts" - between them. Consider the following passage. Antinous is attending his master at an imperial supper, and has, significantly, Ganymede's cup-bearing role:

20 See Symonds' letter to Gosse, 8/3/1878: *Letters, Volume II*, p. 535.

21 Letter to Gosse, February 1878: *Letters, Volume II*, p. 523.

22 Percy L. Babington, in his *Bibliography of the Writings of John Addington Symonds* (London, 1925), supplies all of the original 'Lotos-Garland's revised and excised passages.

23 Symonds, *Many Moods*, p. 123. Further references will be included in the text.

‘I come
 Bearing strong juice of Bacchus. See the foam
 Leaps in the crystal for thy lips, and red
 Glows for thy kisses! Health for thee, my king,
 Health and long life within the cup I bring.’ (128)

The erotically-charged ambiguities of Ganymede’s relationship with Zeus resurface here, where cup-bearing and drinking are resonant of oral-genital exchange. Symonds’ excision of a kiss from this version of the poem (in the original, Antinous’ and Adrian’s “lips met”) increases, if anything, its suggestiveness, by rendering unspecific the point of contact between the two men. The moment recalls Symonds’ pseudo-medical fantasies about semen - ingestion of which, he assured Carpenter, contributed to the well-being of the homosexual lover.²⁴ Traditionally, of course, to achieve orgasm was to ‘die’; dying for one’s (sexual) master emerges here, however, as a serious business: having overheard a Theban seer tell the ailing Emperor that another must suffer in his stead, the “life” Antinous brings Adrian proves ultimately to be his own.

In an earlier poem in *Many Moods*, the Greek Love fantasy ‘In the Syracusan Stone-Quarries’, a defeated Athenian warrior prepares to join his dead companion in the afterworld. In the Roman setting of the ‘Lotos-Garland’ Antinous’ decision to kill himself to protect his beloved raises him to a similar heroic level, but operates in a rather more convoluted way. The suicide figures for Symonds as a redemption, rather than a fulfilment, of this poem’s particular homosexual relationship, for the boy’s actions are also motivated by the fact that he finds life as the Emperor’s catamite intolerable. He is, Symonds reveals, an alien in Adrian’s luxurious Roman court, having been snatched “by pirate hands” (127) from his Bithynian homeland while still a boy and, presumably, installed in the imperial harem. His status as the “toy and bauble of a king” (132) degrades and unmans him; his future as a potential ex-favourite is insecure. He pictures himself as a bride after the honeymoon:

24 See his letter to Carpenter, 29/12/1892: *Letters, Volume III*, pp. 797-8.

now, alone,
 With saffron veil unbound and broken zone,
 My blossom withered, lo, a wanton's doom
 Awaits me, or the purifying tomb! (131)

As in other of Symonds' poems,²⁵ self-immolation provides a path back to manliness once prohibited but tempting homosexual desires or relations have been sampled, and rejected. Antinous throws himself into the Nile,

and his death
 Was seen by no man. Nay there lingereth
 Old legend in the town of Antinoë,

 How that a flight of eagles from the sky
 Down swooping, bore him, rosy breast and thigh
 Lustrous like lightning on their sable plumes,
 Up to the zenith, where, a star, he blooms
 In that bright garden of the grace of Jove,
 The martyr and the miracle of love. (133-4)

The story of Zeus' beloved boy returns to haunt that of Hadrian's - more particularly, to *remove* him from Hadrian's sphere, and assume him into the realms of *Greek* mythology:

There in the morn was found as though asleep,
 The perfect body of the boy; and deep
 Around him, known not till that day, there grew
 Great store of lotos flowers, red, white, and blue,
 But mostly rose-red, flaming in his hair.
 [...] he,
 Raised on their petals, pillowed tenderly,
 And curtained with fresh leaves innumerable,
 Smiled like a god, whom errands amorous
 Lure from Olympus, and coy Naiads find
 Sleeping, and in their rosy love-wreaths bind. (134)

Antinous' life may have been too Roman for Symonds' liking, but the very act of giving

25 The older Greek lover in 'Eudiades', for example (see chapter 1), almost succumbs to the temptation of sodomy - but finds a more noble outlet for his penetrative impulses by stabbing himself in order to rejoin his dead lover in the afterlife.

it up secures him in the pose of Greek Lover: restores him, whole, if not to Hadrian's careless regard, then to the appreciative gaze of the modern Hellenist.

Symonds was not the only writer of the period to be torn between conflicting desires to give voice to Antinous and to secure his silence, to reconstruct his final, enigmatic movements and to retain him in his fascinating role of *spectacle*. Annie Adams Fields, whose poem 'Antinous' was published in 1880, was one of several women writers who, like so many of the male homosexual authors of the period, found Antinous' story compelling. The American Fields wrote, necessarily, from beyond the, often fiercely misogynist, homosexual literary subculture; yet, as the romantic friend of fellow writer Sarah Orne Jewett, she occupied an ambiguous place in relation to its utopian fantasising.

Symonds' version of Antinous clearly influenced Fields'. Her 'Notes' to the poem refer the reader to his *Sketches* chapter, and, as in 'The Lotos-Garland', her Antinous is ingenuous, a boy of apparently simple pleasures. His opening soliloquy, indeed, casts him as a Romantic hero in the Wordsworthian tradition, communing with the "hidden voice" of Nature:

'Stretched on the happy fields that view the sea,
Pillowed on beds of cyclamen, violet, rosemary,
Or treading with cool feet the balmy herb,
Freely I drink the morning and high noon,
And couch above the kine at eventide.
.....
Far rather this than music of the feast
Sung by the white-robed boys to carven lute;
Far rather, lying on the springing grass,
To breathe and listen to the braided notes
From gardens ripening now toward their decay.'²⁶

Even in the natural setting in which he feels most at home, however, Antinous seems to be turning into one of the statues by which he will be best remembered:

26 Annie Adams Fields, *Under the Olive* (Boston, 1881; first published 1880), pp. 99-100. Further references will be included in the text.

'My rounding limbs thus seem to grow and curve
 Into more perfect life; these eyes to swim
 With languor born of music; and these silent lips
 To rest in joys beyond the realm of thought.' (100)

There is a kind of reverse Pygmalion myth in operation here; commentators clearly found it difficult to imagine Antinous as anything other than the magnificent artefact Hadrian, and time, made of him, and felt compelled to revisit the moment of petrification (Georg Ebers' Antinous, for example, almost exactly contemporary with Fields', has a "moulded" and "chiselled" handsomeness, an "inanimate beauty"²⁷). Fields' Antinous plunges into the Nile as a Romantic hero, only to re-emerge, centuries later, a decadent *objet d'art*:

Lo the swift river of time that ever sweeps
 Emperors and cities, monuments and kings,
 Loveliness, luxury, and all earthly joys
 Down to the black gulf of oblivion, -
 Has safely brought these beautiful white limbs,
 Fair crownèd head, and tender dreaming eyes
 Back to our gaze, and the story of his fate.
 He could not know Love, the immortal child,
 Would put his arms about him and so keep
 Undimmed the lofty beauty of his youth! (103)

What different commentators made of Antinous' transformation into an icon of male love obviously depended upon the extent of their homosexual sympathies. Though married (her much older husband died in 1881), Fields wrote this poem in the first years of her friendship with Orne Jewett, with whom she was subsequently to share her home, and the next three decades of her life.²⁸ As we shall see in later chapters, lesbians have been frequent visitors to classical scenes of erotic male bonding (Willa Cather, who in

27 Georg Ebers, *The Emperor*, in *The Historical Romances of Georg Ebers, Volume V*, trans. Clara Bell (New York, 1881), pp. 7 and 256.

28 For more on the Fields-Jewett relationship, see Sarah Way Sherman, *Sarah Orne Jewett, an American Persephone* (Hanover, 1989), and the chapter on 'Boston Marriage' in Lilian Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (London, 1985).

later life would come to know Fields and Orne Jewett well, was another lesbian to find Antinous, in particular, intriguing²⁹). Chris White understands the Greek setting to have provided the romantic friends Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper, for example, with a model with which to make "a homo-political appeal for tolerance" of lesbian, as well as male homosexual, significance.³⁰ Their 'Apollo's Written Grief' (1881),³¹ in which the sun god mourns the death of Hyacinthus, was almost exactly contemporary with Fields' *Under the Olive*, the volume in which 'Antinous' appears. Like them, she found Greek Love appealing (other classically-themed poems in her collection include 'Achilles', in which the hero addresses his dead "beloved", Patroklos [110]); like Symonds she sought perhaps to recuperate Antinous for an essentially Greek tradition of same-sex love and sacrifice:

He nothing knew, save that his life was sweet
And death was bitter, - save that one he loved
The gods had said must part from this fair youth,
His chosen joy, ere Hadrian's fame he won.
What were love worth, if love could not lay down
Fairest possession for the one beloved! (102)

Revisiting this classic drama of Greek Love, however, Fields also subtly defuses its paiderastic charge. Throughout the poem, questions about the *nature* of Antinous' love for Hadrian are elided by a celebration of its *quality*; though male writers bruited the virility of the Greek model, masculine signifiers, in this poem, are rarely brought into conjunction (indeed, in the rhetorical flourish of the last two lines quoted here, gendered pronouns are elided altogether). Revision, as well as appropriation, was clearly one of

29 See her 'Antinous', in *April Twilights and Other Poems* (Boston, 1903), p. 22. For more on Cather's friendship with Fields and Orne Jewett, see Hermione Lee, *Willa Cather: a Life Saved Up* (London, 1989).

30 Chris White, "'Poets and Lovers evermore': the poetry and journals of Michael Field", in Joseph Bristow (ed.), *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing* (London and New York, 1992), pp. 26-43, p. 27.

31 Arran and Isla Leigh [pseud. Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper], *Bellerophôn* (London, 1881). Bradley and Cooper are better known for the work they produced under the later, joint pseudonym of 'Michael Field'.

the ways in which women writers sought to challenge their exclusion from the paiderastic paradigm: caught at the moment of grief or self-sacrifice, Fields' Greek Lovers - like Bradley and Cooper's - are effectively also disarmed.

Other commentators of the period, however, attempted to recover the full force of Hadrian and Antinous' relationship, and condemn it. "*The manner in which a healthy nature perished in its intercourse with a diseased one*", declares Adolf Hausrath's historical novel *Antinous* of 1884, " - that is the history of Antinous and his connection with the Cæsar".³² Hausrath was Professor of Theology at Heidelberg University, and the novel, which focuses upon the struggle for religious hegemony in ancient Rome between classical, oriental and Christian cults, is ostensibly concerned with Antinous' spiritual demise at the hands of corrupt patricians. But the sexological implications of the vocabulary here - *health, intercourse, disease* - reveal the extent to which his narrative of spiritual crisis is informed by the discourse of sexual deviance, his vision of ancient theological and cultural conflict resonant with a debate of far more contemporary significance.

The novel makes a kind of resisting re-reading of Antinous' story in the light of Symonds' 'Lotos-Garland'. Like Symonds, Hausrath appreciates the homoerotic tradition which gives the relationship between Antinous and the Emperor (again, here, Adrian) its shape and significance. Adrian loves Antinous "as Socrates did Alcibiades, and as Cæsar did Brutus" (7); Antinous soothes the fevered brow of the sleepless Emperor just as "a thousand years before" Jonathan "had sung to rest" King David (18). As in Symonds' poem, the relationship represents only a debased version of a classical ideal: Antinous is bonded to Adrian as a sexual servant or slave, and resents the life of isolation and

32 George Taylor [pseud. Adolf Hausrath], *Antinous: An Historical Romance of the Roman Empire*, trans. 'J. D. M.' (London, 1884), p. 9. The novel appeared originally, under the same pseudonym, as *Antinous: Historischer Roman aus der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Leipzig, 1880), and was translated, by Mary J. Safford, into an American edition of 1882. I consider 'J. D. M.'s translation, however, to be more faithful to the German original (not least because it respects the homoerotic implications of the text with which Safford seems uncomfortable) and refer, throughout, to the London edition. Further page references will be included in the text.

inaction to which Adrian's attentions condemn him. He longs to wrestle with the other Roman youths, but they are afraid of injuring him, and Adrian, who is busy Hellenising the Villa Adriani "like an æsthetic exquisite" (192), wants only to have him sit for sculptors. In Hausrath's fiction, however, Antinous gains insight into the indignity of his position as the Emperor's eromenos from a significant source: Natalis and Vitalis, the Christian sons of Adrian's servant, Phlegon, with whom he steals a few hours' exercise. They are appalled by what they consider to be the misuse of his extraordinarily perfect body: "'It does not become one who can throw the discus as you do'", they tell him, "'to perform woman's service for the Cæsar'" (220). What emerged in Symonds' poem as a perversion of an essentially noble antique ideal figures in this Christian novel as, simply, a perversion. There is no path for Antinous into respectable, Greek pederasty; when the Emperor attempts to crown him with a floral chaplet, and salutes him "'Well! my Ganymede!'" - precisely, of course, what Symonds had done in the closing lines of the 'Lotos-Garland' - he revolts. "'I do not wish to be adorned like a mistress,' cried out Antinous angrily, pushing away the flowers. 'I hate this love, which degrades me to myself'" (222).

Antinous' desire to free himself from Adrian's service is rendered more urgent by the emergence of new desires - "feelings which were before wholly unknown to him" (359) - for women. He imagines settling down with a Roman maiden - possibly Natalis and Vitalis' Christian sister - and raising a family. Here too, however, his status as the Emperor's favourite defeats him. When he attempts to flirt with two women of the court, they reject him scornfully as "'the beautiful parrot of Adrian'" (390). "'Farewell, beautiful Adonis!'" one of them mocks - again, affirming his Hellenised status. "'As you are the beloved of the Cæsar yourself, I can make no use of your kisses. I know nothing of love matters between three'" (390-1). Such rebuffs deepen Antinous' more general anxiety. He has inherited a simple pantheistic faith from his Bithynian background; he is bewildered by the range of cults to which life at the sophisticated court exposes him, and shocked at Adrian's casual manipulation of Greek, Roman and Egyptian creeds. Many characters in this novel are prepared to commit self-sacrifice; but Hausrath is careful to discredit the act which, for Symonds, established Antinous in the pantheon of

Greek Lovers, and which for many commentators lent the youth the glamour of a homosexual martyr. Natalis and Vitalis are almost thrown to the lions when they refuse to renounce their faith, but saved at the last moment by a fellow Christian; the ingenuous Antinous is tricked into giving up his life by a corrupt Egyptian priest, who, at the instigation of Adrian's enemy, Verus, makes the Emperor a false prophesy.

Adrian's distress at the suicide of his favourite is profound, and he initiates the new cult of Antinous worship, which spreads throughout the Empire. Phlegon, on the other hand, follows his children's example and converts to Christianity. "Since I have seen how gods spring up," he tells the Emperor, "I have longed after the one God, who was God before Adonis, or Mithras, or Antinous was in existence" (432). Adrian, however, has faith in the youth he has deified: "In a hundred years Antinous will be a God like Mithras", he assures Phlegon, " - while nobody will ever speak a word more about your crucified Jew". "Those who come after us will live to see it," answers the Christian (435). He can, of course, afford to be complacent; Hausrath, like Symonds in his *Sketches* essay but with rather less ambivalence, is observing the struggle for religious hegemony with Christian hindsight. The novel ends on an image of the triumphant Phlegon, reunited with his family and cultivating their "beautiful garden of God" (440). The combined spiritual and procreative image recalls, once again, the extent to which religious and sexological models interweave in Hausrath's scheme: the replacement of paganism by Christianity is also the imposition of a heterosexual standard. In Adrian's all-male court Antinous' seed was tragically mis-spent, his body inappropriately dedicated to antique fantasy. In this Christian novel which bears Antinous' name, Jesus is the absent referent, the *under*-represented god as opposed to the over-fetishised Antinous. "We have all sinned against the lad", Phlegon tells a Christian bishop, "in not having instructed him as to his proper aims in life. Man is made to labour, and it is no proper destiny to be beautiful, least of all for a young man. From this vacuity sprang all his melancholy, and it could end in no other way than it has done" (426).

The anxiety observable in this conservative Antinous fiction about gender *proprieties* was, in its late nineteenth century context, entirely appropriate. For homosexual and decadent writers it was precisely the notion that Antinous had made a

career out of beauty - a beauty entirely of surface, from which all moral significance had, indeed, been 'evacuated' - that made him so compelling; as *fin-de-siècle* movements gathered momentum, he was rapidly appropriated by a variety of narratives which attempted to subvert social and sexual norms. From French decadence, in particular, and from the British literature most influenced by the French model, a new Antinous emerged, to find himself in competition with other, previously dominant models - the paiderastic hero, established by Symonds and nurtured by such writers as Hugh McCulloch, whose 1894 'Antinoüs' knows "the bliss/ Of love surpassing woman's love"; and the abused slave, ingenuous victim of sophisticated Roman schemers, who reappeared in works like Abbie Carter Goodloe's 1891 tragedy *Antinoüs*.³³ The decadent Antinous - like the Mona Lisa, whom Pater eulogised in his influential *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) - was revered as an enigma; writers avoided dispelling his mystery, as Symonds had done, with historical reconstruction. His silences, his subjection to the fantasies in which the Emperor chose to involve him, were inscribed into the decadent sado-masochistic plot, redefined as tokens of power rather than of subjection. Above all, his historical and his object status were conflated: he appears in *fin-de-siècle* literature sometimes as beloved boy, sometimes as priceless artefact, more often as a subversive combination of the two.

Decadent (re)visions

As Mario Praz suggests, Antinous' role in decadent literature was, if highly resonant, limited; reference to an emerald-eyed bust of the youth, for example, suggestive of both sexual and aesthetic excess, became a cliché of the genre.³⁴ It is just such a bust - its "enamelled eyes [glittering] with desire" - which presides over Raoule de Vénérande's

33 Hugh McCulloch, 'Antinoüs', in *The Quest of Heracles and Other Poems* (Cambridge and Chicago, 1894), p. 51. Abbie Carter Goodloe, *Antinoüs: A Tragedy* (Philadelphia, 1891).

34 Such a bust appears, for example, in the fiction of d'Aurevilly (*Diaboliques*) and Lorrain (*Monsieur de Phocas*). See Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, p. 328.

confessions of gender and sexual transgressions in Rachilde's *Monsieur Venus* (1884).³⁵ Raoule has taken a mistress - not another woman, but an effeminate youth, Jacques, whom she sets up in a rich apartment and transforms into the passive object of her increasingly virile desires. If she is the "new Sappho" (76), Jacques is a grotesque modern Antinous - "the Antinous of boulevard Montparnasse" (98) - and his fate, if not hers, is predetermined. "'Come now, my lad!'", urges Raittolbe, Jacques' fencing instructor, "'Come now, dammit. Tighten your grip... You're a man not a statue!'" (110); but by the end of the novel the new Antinous, killed in a duel, has indeed become a purely aesthetic object. Raoule locks herself up with his body and a pair of "scarlet tweezers" (143); the novel's final scene finds her visiting, sometimes in female dress, sometimes in male, her secret "nuptial chamber" (118):

On the shell-shaped couch guarded by a marble Eros, there lies a wax mannequin covered in a skin of transparent rubber. His red hair, his blond lashes, the golden down upon his chest are natural; the teeth that adorn his mouth, the nails of his hands and feet have been torn from a corpse. His enamel eyes have an adorable look in them. (144)

It was precisely Antinous' amenability to narratives of the triumph, not of nature over artifice, but of artifice over nature, which facilitated his assimilation into aestheticism and decadence. Rachilde, like Fields, understands Antinous to be a kind of reverse Galatea. Raoule derives erotic gratification from what, for Pygmalion, was the source of sexual frustration: the artificial nature of her lover's embraces. Pygmalion's ivory statue was brought to life by the sympathetic intervention of the goddess of love; Raoule's mannequin - an "anatomical masterpiece" - is animated by German technology: when she embraces it and kisses it upon the lips, a "spring set inside the lower body is connected to the mouth and makes it move" (144).

Close relative, perhaps, of Rachilde's mannequinised lover is the Antinous of Ernest Raynaud's French sonnet of 1891 (translated for readers of *The Artist* by its editor, Kains Jackson): an Antinous of "amber flesh" and "ambrosial" blood, "A dream of

³⁵ Rachilde [pseud. Marguerite Eymery], *Monsieur Venus*, trans. Liz Heron (Sawtry, 1992; first published in French, 1884), p. 49. Further references will be included in the text.

Rubies 'neath transparent gold".³⁶ This, too, is the Antinous who recurs in those catalogues of treasures to which, as Neil Bartlett has pointed out, Wilde's writing compulsively returns us: catalogues of both boys and jewels; catalogues in which boys *become* jewels, are "effortlessly converted into objects, luxuries, additions to a fabulous collection".³⁷ For such writers, Antinous represents a paradigmatic *objet*, Hadrian, his master, a prototypical aesthete. *Desire* - rather than Hellenism, its ambiguous signifier - is what binds them to the Hadrianic original; Antinous - desire's perfect, always-elusive object - presides over the transhistorical faith of which they and the Emperor alike are the passionate devotees: "Glory throughout the world thy conquering name/ Has celebrated," Raynaud's sonnet begins, "and through ages sung/ The Asian youth whose cult's melodious flame/ Lends bitter-sweetness to the poet's tongue". As we saw in chapter 1, such a cult had fired the imaginations of many homosexual writers of the *fin de siècle*. Symonds had hinted at the distinguished role Antinous might play in such a faith, in 1879; Montague Summers' 'Antinous', of 1907, explores the idea more fully.

Like many homophile writers of this period, Summers was a practising Christian - a Roman Catholic and a churchman (though, in the year following 'Antinous' publication, he was, according to d'Arch Smith, "arraigned" for a homosexual offence which "halted his preferment in the Church"³⁸). But like the Reverend Bradford - who produced his own poem on the Antinous theme, 'Hadrian's Soliloquy', in 1916 - he managed to reconcile his faith with the most subversive of paiderastic visions. "Hast thou then been discrownèd all these years," he asks Antinous in his own archaic idiom,

Hidden away before the face of those
Who would adore some Sinaitic Sire?
His service is cruel trembling and wan fears
Of horrid punishment, whose signal glows
An oriflamme of wrath and penal fire!³⁹

36 Ernest Raynaud, 'Antinous', trans. Philip Castle [i.e. Kains Jackson], in *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture*, 1 October 1891, p. 293.

37 Neil Bartlett, *Who Was That Man?: A Present for Mr Oscar Wilde* (London, 1988), p. 178.

38 Timothy d'Arch Smith, *Love in Earnest* (London, 1970), p. 118.

39 Montague Summers, *Antinous and Other Poems* (London, 1907), p. 14. Further references will be included in the text.

Summers looks not to the Jehova of the Old Testament but to the Jesus of the New - a significantly homophile Jesus, who "Most soothly found the world right fair alway,/ Whether it was the flowers He looked upon, [...] Or the dear face of His beloved John" (14-15). Nevertheless, Christianity - even the paiderastic variety - represents for Summers only an imperfect version of the cult it drove underground; his vision restores Antinous, whose star "Blazed [...] with a fiercer flame" than the one which led the three kings to Bethlehem (10), to his rightful place at the head of a procession of fungible icons:

Thou livest robed in Christian saintliness,
Pale, pure, and virgin, on the frescoed wall
Of gentle Perugino [...]. Thou, a martyr there
Lashed to a tree trunk, smit with javelins
Men term Sebastian.
.....
'Tis thou we worship aye in many a guise
When with much incense mingle votive cries,
'Pray for our souls, sweet Aloysius.'
.....
O Amor mysticus, great mystery!
New gods arise, and antique altars fall;
The ancient kingdoms totter to decay
As infant nations rewrite history,
O'er whom again shall swift time shed a pall
Of kind forgetfulness. But thy strange sway
Prevaileth thro' all years. A magic fire
Consuming e'en our souls! For evermore
We kiss thy feet, we worship and adore,
Proceeding from desire unto desire. (16-20)

Summers' preoccupation with events *subsequent* to Antinous' death and deification - the point at which most earlier Antinous fictions ended - was typical of the readings that emerged in the early twentieth century, when Antinous' story was well-known and his homoerotic significance assured. Bradford's poem, as its title suggests, has an ailing Hadrian looking forward to reunion with his lost beloved after death;⁴⁰ Jean Lorrain's Antinoüs of 1920 stands "on the threshold of unknown centuries" and smiles "across the

40 Rev. E. E. Bradford, 'Hadrian's Soliloquy', in *Lays of Love and Life* (London, 1916).

scorn of history", charging the dreams of his "unknown brothers".⁴¹ In Ferdinand Pessoa's *Antinous* of 1918 it is the grieving Emperor himself who is unnaturally prescient - he "weeps and knows that every future age/ Is staring at him out of the to-be",⁴² and resolves to deify Antinous for their sake:

My sorrow shall make thee its god, and set
Thy naked presence on the parapet
That looks over the seas of future times.
Some shall say our love was vice and crimes.
Others against our names, as stones, shall whet
The knife of their glad hate of beauty, and make
Our name a pillory, a scaffold and a stake
Whereon to burn our brothers yet unborn. (14)

The modern homosexual's identification with Hadrian is here anachronistically reversed; the Emperor anticipates both the centuries of intolerance that will give his relationship with Antinous resonance, and the particular form of retrospection that will invest that resonance with homosexual meaning.

Antinous and homosexual anxiety

Many writers, it seems, found it difficult or undesirable to reconstruct Antinous without foregrounding the homosexual historiographical project which had so successfully retrieved him; in some fictions of the period, indeed, Antinous' own biography is all but eclipsed by the more fascinating fact of his susceptibility to decadent or aestheticist fetishisation. Ella Sharpe Youngs' 'The Apotheosis of Antinoös: A Lyrical Drama', for

41 Jean Lorrain, 'Antinoös', in *Les Sang Des Dieux* (Paris, 1920), p. 136. My translation.

42 Fernando Pessoa, *Antinous* (Lisbon, 1918), p. 6. Further references will be included in the text. According to Edwin Honig and Susan M. Brown in their Preface to the *Poems of Fernando Pessoa* (New York, 1986), p. xv, Pessoa wrote this poem "in order to free himself of an obsession". The extent of the Portuguese poet's homosexual sympathies are, however, hard to gauge. *Antinous* was written in English, but superseded by a later, fuller, Portuguese version, and is certainly peripheral to the often very cohesive British homosexual literary subculture of the period.

example, is an Antinous fiction which has no foundation in Antinous' story at all. Youngs bases her drama on a real statue, the Capitoline 'Antinous', an earlier work traditionally but wrongly identified as Roman.⁴³ "It will be seen that this work of Art", she writes in her Preface, "is, in the following poem, entirely unassociated with any idea of the favourite of the Emperor Hadrian, and is considered merely as an exquisite imitation in Art of a perfect work of Nature, handed down to us from the remote ages of Greece".⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the parable of artistic creation Youngs weaves around the false Antinous is also, I shall be arguing, an allegory of homosexual desire and its dangers. Her prefatory disclaimer notwithstanding, Youngs' historical narrative is as much preoccupied with the contemporary appropriation of Antinous by Hellenists and decadents as was Hausrath's.

As her Preface suggests, Youngs is interested in recovering the "perfect work of Nature" behind the work of art. The latter, she hints, can, at best, only ever be an exquisite *imitation*: her drama offers itself as a cautionary tale for those who would over-prioritise aesthetics. Amphion, the imaginary Greek sculptor to whom she credits authorship of the Capitoline marble, is just such an aesthete. He inhabits, alone, a workshop filled with the exquisite sculptures that have earned him the reputation of one of Greece's finest artists; Ganymede, significantly, is prominent among them. But he longs to create a *perfect* work, an exact simulacrum of nature: "My work must *live* and image forth the *True*" (8). To achieve his ambition he enters into a compact with a Demogorgon - for he also has a more sinister reputation, is "one, whom Rumour/ Speaks of mysteriously below her breath" (61). The Demogorgon gives him a magic bracelet which, when attached to the arm of a mortal, will turn them to stone; Amphion plans to hold a model in an ideal pose and produce his own, marble, imitation. He finds a suitable subject; it is, of course, Antinoüs, a youth of perfect proportions, whom Amphion lures

43 Lambert, at least, seems to agree with Youngs that the statue is Greek and misnamed (217); Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, on the other hand, list the figure as Antinous in the guise of Hermes, a Hadrianic copy of a Greek model, in their *Taste and the Antique: the Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500-1900* (New Haven and London, 1981), p. 144.

44 Ella Sharpe Youngs, *The Apotheosis of Antinoüs and Other Poems* (London, 1887), p. 4. Further references will be included in the text.

back to his studio and there transfixes:

A fixed and lovely stoniness o'ertook
 The purple blood of Youth, and rigidly
 Each muscle stiffened, and, obedient
 To the mysterious charm, the sinews stood
 - As if fear o'er them passed a hurrying hand -
 Inactive, while the flesh turned marble pale
 To patient beauty; and he stands fore'er
 Perfection motionless. (22)

The Pygmalion myth which has formed a subtext to many of the Antinous fictions we've been looking at resurfaces here, once again in a significantly inverted form. Amphion is infatuated with the boy's beauty, and wishes to immortalise it; when he finds he is incapable of reproducing Antinoös' perfect shape, he ruthlessly decides to imprison the living youth in marble for ever. Antinoös' sisters trace the boy to Amphion's workshop; when they are confronted with the marble likeness of their missing brother - which, marvellously, manages to raise its eyelids and gaze piteously at them - they plead in vain with the sculptor to free his victim. The Demogorgon similarly demands Antinoös' release, and describes to Amphion the boy's misery. But the artist is prepared to sacrifice Antinoös for his aesthetic ideal: "Were I as fair," he claims, "all sordid suffering/ Would be eclipsed by the superior joy/ Of being so" (31). The Demogorgon even conjures speech from Antinoös himself - but Amphion is deaf to all arguments that have no basis in aesthetics: "Sweet boy, address thy suppliant lips to me," he entreats. "I fain would feel the passion of their pain/ Thrill through my soul, and wake in it a new/ Emotion, to embody in my work" (36).

The scandal of Antinoös' abduction, however, spreads; Plato and Socrates, even, discuss it. Antinoös' sisters invoke the authority of the Areopagus, and Amphion is put on trial. The Greek citizens, as Amphion has calculated, are loath to condemn the celebrated sculptor, and impressed by what they take to be his latest, exquisite creation. They are shocked when the Demogorgon appears and denounces Amphion - significantly not as a murderer, but as a counterfeiter: "I will not disappear/ Until all Greece has learnt the shameful lie/ Thou art, ambitious man; and renegade/ To Art, in that thou honourest

not Truth/ Its twin" (69); they are appalled at the claims which Amphion, struck temporarily insane, makes on behalf of the fake statue:

O boy, I am thy lover,
 Creator too. From Inspiration's loins
 Into the womb of Thought thou, my best work,
 And last, didst pass ineffable and dear.
 And through the travail terrible and strong
 Of arduous activity, and toil
 Promethean, thou standest forth to Greece
 Untrammelled, unexampled; perfect Youth
 And perfect Beauty - god above all gods! (85)

"Is that not blasphemy?" cry the assembled citizens (85); such hubris in a Greek drama can only, of course, end in tragedy. Amphion confusedly plucks the magic bracelet from Antinoüs' arm, and the lad "slowly changes back into flesh" (87). He is invited to pass sentence on his tormenter, and forbids the corrupt artist ever to sculpt again. The final scene returns Amphion to his lonely workshop; while, outside, the Greek citizens hail the revived Antinoüs, he kills himself by drinking a glass of poisoned wine.

I have reproduced Youngs' plot at length because, despite its Greek setting - and partly, even because of it - the text forms such an excellent and obvious commentary on the Antinous fictions we have looked at so far. It is, clearly, informed by a variety of key Victorian narratives - Amphion is as much a Frankenstein or Mad Doctor figure as a inverted Pygmalion, for example⁴⁵ - but it must have had a particular resonance for the 1880s, when anxiety about radical new challenges to aesthetic, sexual and gender norms was at a peak. Elaine Showalter has highlighted the fantasies of "male reproduction or self-replication", long a staple of the Western literary tradition, which "reemerged with a particular virulence in the 1880s" in the masculine romances of Stevenson, Rider Haggard and Wells.⁴⁶ We might read Youngs' drama as a protesting response to such

45 For more on the 'Mad Doctor' figure (specifically, in the context of the London 'Jack the Ripper' murders of the 1880s) see Judith Walkowitz's *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London, 1992).

46 Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (Harmondsworth, 1990), p. 78.

fantasies: Amphion's blasphemous and revealing outburst is, of course, a subversion of sexual and generative norms. Pygmalion loved Galatea, the woman of whom he was also the creator; Amphion's passion is doubly presumptuous, since the beloved product of his imaginary womb is also male.

But to identify the misogyny which Youngs' text counters is to risk overlooking the anti-homosexual anxiety it inscribes. Showalter's interpretation of male writers' attempts to imagine an alternative, masculine generative model as purely anti-feminist fails to acknowledge the important challenges to sexual orthodoxy those models often constituted. Many of the writers she highlights - among others, Wilde, Symonds and Gerard Manley Hopkins - were homosexual; as we saw in chapter 1, the revalorisation of ancient, non-procreative cultural paradigms was a vital feature of homosexual self-definition. 'The Apotheosis of Antinoüs', I would suggest, has just such a homosexual cultural project as its particular referent; like Hausrath's, Youngs' Antinous longs to free himself from the imprisoning fantasies of the older Greek Lover. Released, herself, from the confines of the Roman master-narrative - the story of the 'real' Antinous - Youngs is, however, free to rewrite it. In her drama, Antinoüs is restored to the family from which he was lured by the male seducer and, true to a tradition anti-homosexual texts would maintain well into the twentieth century, it is Amphion, the solitary male lover, who commits suicide.

When Amphion the aesthete is convicted of corruption, it is both his art and his excessive interest in handsome young boys that the legislators have in mind. The scenario is such a familiar one to us that it is impossible not to read in Youngs' text a commentary upon an event - the trial of Oscar Wilde - which would, in fact, not take place until eight years after the drama's publication. Like Amphion's trial, Wilde's, in Gagnier's words, "confronted the public with an art that refused to say nothing but the truth, that refused to take its interrogation solemnly", and with "a sexuality outside of the rational demands of reproduction".⁴⁷ Like Amphion himself, Wilde's confidence in his protected aesthetic status proved to be tragically misplaced; after his imprisonment Lord Alfred Douglas

⁴⁷ Gagnier, *Idylls*, p. 139.

lamented the fact that "I cannot see Oscar nor give him anything, not even some poison to kill himself with".⁴⁸ Youngs' prescience and Wilde's realisation of his own aphorism that life imitates art both, of course, reflect the exigencies of a *fin-de-siècle* culture saturated with discourses of sexual transgression to which, spectacularly, homosexuals both contributed and fell victim. It is not surprising, perhaps, that such a period should compulsively retell a story in which an ambitious aesthete conceives a fatal passion for the beautiful youth he has iconicised; such a tale has been somewhere at the heart of all the texts I have examined so far, for Antinous' appeal, for homosexual and non- or anti-homosexual commentators alike, lay precisely in his amenability to it. Four years after the publication of Youngs' drama, of course, Wilde himself reinforced the story's homosexual resonance with *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), and incidentally made it notorious, "heavy with the mephitic odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction - a gloating study of the mental and physical corruption of a fresh, fair and golden youth".⁴⁹ Wilde's novel, and his own personal fate, may have had a direct influence on the last text I'd like, briefly, to look at - a poem which, appropriately enough, restates the *fin-de-siècle* Antinous fiction in its baldest form.

Like Youngs' drama, Kate Everest's 'The Dreaming Antinous' (1912) takes a statue of Antinous as its starting-point - perhaps even the same one that fired Youngs' imagination, for, together with a portrait in the Vatican collection, the Capitoline 'Antinous' was once the most famous representation of Hadrian's favourite, as celebrated in the last century "as are today the 'Mona Lisa' and the 'Birth of Venus'".⁵⁰ Everest, however, reverses Youngs' text; like so many previous commentators, she invokes the Pygmalion myth, but this time restores its original trajectory - displaying, in the process, a remarkable familiarity with the topography of male homosexual fantasy. Such familiarity, as I have suggested, was quite appropriate to an era in which an unspeakable homosexuality was nevertheless so vocal, and so influential; Everest's interest in the literary motifs of a deviant subculture may, however, have been more than academic: her

48 From a letter to George Cecil Ives, quoted in Gagnier, *Idylls*, p. 173.

49 From the *Daily Chronicle's* review of *A Picture of Dorian Gray*, quoted in Gagnier, *Idylls*, p. 59.

50 Haskell and Penny, *Taste and the Antique*, p. xiv.

collection, dedicated to a female friend, contains a number of love poems - 'My Love', 'Heart of mine', 'My Lady's Bower' - in which, although the gender of the speaker is left unclear, a woman is clearly the eulogised or addressee.

'The Dreaming Antinous' continues the preoccupation with the fatal relationship between the aesthete and the handsome male object of his appropriative gaze. Like Youngs' drama, its action is located in an artist's studio: a space, removed from public scrutiny, where unmanly and perhaps subversive deeds are committed. But Everest's poem is set in the present rather than the past: its studio is an Edwardian salon; its subject is the commodified Antinous of the modern collection:

Some rare Art treasures brought from far-off climes
Were lying all around.

The rarest one
A statue by Praxiteles; it stood
So pure and white against dark draperies
The statue of 'The Dreaming Antinous.'
The soft light fell athwart the graceful limbs
Gleaming in their white beauty. 'Twas a form
Of perfect loveliness; the head was drooped,
A smile, half-mocking, half-caressing, curved
Those proud young lips, serene in their still rest.⁵¹

The confusion evident here over Antinous' origins is, once again, striking: Praxiteles, the celebrated Greek sculptor, was, of course, far too early to have been able to model Hadrian's favourite. Like Youngs, Everest provides Antinous with the Hellenic background his nineteenth-century homosexual champions demanded; her Praxiteles has performed Amphion's magic: has seen his subject dreaming of love and "Imprisoned [that look] in marble, so the soul/ Of Antinous, for all time, should live on/ To show the world his perfect loveliness" (10).

But what ancient Greeks performed with ease, modern Hellenists, working in an imperfect and hostile environment, often fail to reproduce. Before the 'Dreaming Antinous' stands a painter, attempting in vain to capture the statue's particular power:

51 K. Everest, *The Dreaming Antinous and Other Poems* (London, 1912), pp. 9-10. Further references will be included in the text.

"The form was there, but not the soul,/ The living beauty, all that served to make/ The breathless marble live" (10). As we saw in chapters 1 and 2, classical statuary held a special appeal for modern Greek Lovers. Statues invited homosexual speculation, beckoned the male lover into an alternative, sympathetic culture - but ultimately frustrated him with their coldness, their muteness, their very antiqueness. Symonds had longed to reanimate Greek sculpture; Everest's thwarted artist similarly urges his tantalising statue back to life:

'O Antinous,
My dreaming Antinous! if you could live
But for an hour, if in your living form
I could but see you! then, O surely then
I know that I could paint you! I would give
My life to see you for a short hour's space
In all your living beauty face to face!' (11)

His words, as it turns out, are rash ones. As he rests, or dozes, something startling happens to the statue: a "roseate glow" seems to suffuse the "lifeless marble, giving it the hue/ Of re-awakening life and radiant youth" (11). Antinous has, indeed, come back to life:

The dreaming Antinous flung back his head,
Then stepping off his pedestal, he stood
In god-like beauty, grace and glowing youth.
A living image by a master wrought
To stand again among the sons of men
To show them how the Grecian youths were bred! (12)

Antinous rouses the artist and tells him he has but one hour in which to complete his portrait, "While I will sing thee songs of my own land,/ And tell thee tales of those far-distant years" (12). He sings of "hours [...] crowded with joys", and of life at "Adrian's court"; as the artists paints, "The present vanished and they both were back/ In the dim distance of past centuries" (13).

The hour passes; the painter has indeed captured the "soul of Antinous" and

produced a masterpiece. But Antinous seeks a gift in return:

‘Sleep well, O Artist! dream of me. Farewell.’
 Then bending down he touched the painter’s lips
 With the white lily swaying in his hand.
 And, stepping back upon his pedestal,
 The golden sunlight melted into dusk
 And all the air around grew very still. (14)

The picture becomes "world-famous"; the artist, however, never learns of his glory: "they had found him there/ Lifeless, before the wonder he had wrought/ In silent rest, and everlasting sleep" (15). The poem’s last lines return us to the statue, now grown slightly sinister: "A perfect form, he stands in perfect rest/ Breathing of love, ‘The Dreaming Antinous’" (15).

Everest’s statue recalls those other dangerous artefacts - vampiric portraits and Fatal Books - with which turn-of-the-century writing is littered;⁵² in particular, it brings to mind two imaginary likenesses of Wilde’s: the portrait of Mr W.H., and the picture of Dorian Gray. Both of these paintings exert a fatal influence over the men who become obsessed with them. In defence of the former, the counterfeited portrait which ‘reveals’ the homoerotic secret at the heart of Shakespeare’s sonnets, two men die, one of them voluntarily. Dorian Gray’s picture is overburdened with secrets: not just with those unnameable crimes of Gray himself, who is found, of course, like Everest’s artist, slumped at its feet at the novel’s close, but with the homosexual desire of its creator, Basil Hallward, who perhaps more closely resembles Everest’s doomed aesthete. He, too, produces his "best work" when, under the spell of Dorian Gray’s perfect beauty, he succeeds in capturing it on canvas: "‘What [...] the face of Antinoüs was to late Greek sculpture,’" he tells Lord Henry early on, "‘the face of Dorian Gray will some day be to me’".⁵³ He, too, is destroyed by the creation into which he has "‘put too much of

52 For more on the Fatal Book, see Linda Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Princeton, 1986).

53 Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Harmondsworth, 1984), p. 16. Further references will be included in the text.

[him]self" (129). But Everest's text is also something of a revision of Wilde's. Where Hallward is stabbed, and his body grotesquely disposed of, Everest's artist is kissed into eternal sleep - a sleep haunted by the ageless figure whose dreaming status he now shares. Where Hallward's secret is exposed and transformed, in Showalter's words, into the "visible vice" sexology maintained homosexual desire must be,⁵⁴ Everest's painter enters into a secret compact with the icon of his desires: enters, perhaps, that timeless continuum at the head of which, as we've seen, many homosexual writers derived satisfaction from placing Antinous.

'The Dreaming Antinous' thus directs our attention to a variety of earlier texts. While Symonds, in the 1870s, rightly felt that he was rescuing Antinous from censorious obscurity, by the 1910s it was clearly impossible to produce an Antinous fiction without invoking a weighty cultural tradition. As we shall see in later chapters, imaginary histories have often been inspired, and real ones shamelessly transformed, in the wake of influential homosexual fictions. In the case of Antinous the discrete strands of history, fiction and myth are often hard to disentangle: given the persistent *fin-de-siècle* conflation of Antinous' history with that of Oscar Wilde, it should come as no surprise that Polish writer Jan Parandowski's 1921 biography of Wilde is entitled *Antinous W Aksamitnym Berecie* - 'Antinous in a Velvet Beret'.

But, as I've also been suggesting, Antinous attracted the attention of such a range of commentators at this time precisely because his story seemed so compatible with contemporary homosexual paradigms. As these paradigms evolved, Antinous' appeal lessened; homosexual invocation of Hadrian's favourite (often occluded, curiously enough, by a new interest in the Emperor himself⁵⁵) became increasingly sporadic, and inevitably more esoteric. By the time of his appearance in Stead's *Salzburg Tales*, for

⁵⁴ Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*, p. 177.

⁵⁵ Marguerite Yourcenar, of course, took the Antinous fiction to new heights with her 1951 *Mémoires d'Hadrien*; novelist T. H. White, a troubled and idiosyncratic boy-lover, built his own personal temple to Hadrian after reading Yourcenar's novel (see Sylvia Townsend Warner's *T. H. White* [London, 1967], pp. 291-2).

example, he is something of a period piece. Tellingly about a poet who falls under the spell of an Antinous statue, and wastes his life in obsessive re-tracing of the beautiful youth's steps, the significance of 'The Festival Director's Tale' is nevertheless rather lost on its audience:

'Antinoüs,' said the Schoolteacher, 'the statue?'

'I know,' said the Banker: 'I have a statue of him in my entry. A chap sold him to me, telling me it was something out of the way. I looked him up in the "Britannica": wasn't he the most famous fairy in history?'

'Until a year or so ago,' agreed the Director.⁵⁶

Whichever particular usurping fairy the Director, or Stead, has in mind, the implications of her story are clear. Though Sulamith Ish Kishor would make a brave stab at it in 1935 - identifying Antinous as, "to use the technical phraseology, a mother-fixated passive homoerotic", who committed suicide in an attempt to return to the womb⁵⁷ - it was difficult to relocate Antinous' once so pertinent example to the homosexual iconography of the twentieth century.

⁵⁶ Christina Stead, *The Salzburg Tales* (London, 1934), p. 392.

⁵⁷ Sulamith Ish Kishor, *Magnificent Hadrian* (London, 1935), p. 293.

CHAPTER 4

Sappho and Lesbian Ambiguity

While Antinous' iconic homosexual status has largely been overlooked by literary historians, a series of studies appearing over the last two decades have attempted to ensure that Sappho's will never be forgotten. Elaine Marks, for example, in an essay of 1979, identifies Sappho's prominence in lesbian mythology: "Sappho and her island Lesbos", she writes, "are omnipresent in literature about women loving women, whatever the gender or sexual preference of the writer and whether or not Sappho and her island are explicitly named".¹ Susan Gubar, in her influential 'Sapphistries' (1984), traces a distinctly female Sapphic literary tradition. "From the poems by Katharine Philips, 'the English Sappho,' celebrating female friendship", she writes, "to the provocative blank page under the entry for Sappho in Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig's *Lesbian Peoples Material for a Dictionary* (1979), from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's translations and Christina Rossetti's variations to recent publications like Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love's *Sappho Was a Right-On Woman* (1972) and Pat Califia's *Sapphisty* (1980), the person and poetics of Sappho have haunted the female imagination".² Gubar's essay celebrates, as it investigates, Sappho's status as sexual and literary paradigm, and recovers other Sapphic heroines. For her, as for many feminist critics, the 'fantastic collaborations' between writers like Renée Vivien, H.D., Amy Lowell, Marguerite Yourcenar, and Sappho, their suppressed literary foremother, constitute exemplary lesbian fictions: "the

¹ Elaine Marks, 'Lesbian Intertextuality', in George Stambolian and Elaine Marks (eds.), *Homosexualities and French Literature* (Ithaca, 1979), pp. 353-77, p. 356.

² Susan Gubar, 'Sapphistries', in Estelle B. Freedman, Barbara C. Gelpi, Susan L. Johnson and Kathleen M. Weston (eds.), *The Lesbian Issue: Essays from SIGNS* (Chicago and London, 1985), pp. 91-110, p. 92. Further references will be included in the text.

writers in this tradition were clearly attempting a radical redefinition of the barren grounds of heterosexual culture in general and of a male-dominated literary history in particular" (109).

Vivien, in particular - along with her lover, Natalie Barney, one of the most radical Sapphic 'collaborators' - has been recuperated for a modern lesbian readership. Her once well-respected work was rescued from the obscurity into which it was subsequently allowed to slip by lesbian and gay presses, who issued translations of her poetry and prose in the late 1970s - hailing her writing, in a lesbian feminist rhetoric then at its most assured, as "gynocentric".³ Such a reading replicated Vivien's own project; indeed, translating *A l'Heure des Mains jointes* (1906) in 1979, Sandia Belgrade experienced a bond with Vivien which echoed that enjoyed by Vivien with Sappho herself: "We women", she writes in her Introduction to that volume, "are linked in an erotic continuum, a circle that spirals out into time and encompasses myth and love".⁴ Literary historians have often been scarcely less uncritical in their celebrations of Vivien's Sapphic project: Elyse Blankley, for example, writes that Vivien "bridged twenty-seven centuries of patriarchal culture to recover both a matriarchal community and a glorious female genealogy".⁵ Joan de Jean, more helpfully, combines an enthusiasm for Vivien's feminist, lesbian Sappho with a sensitivity to the particular discursive dynamics surrounding her construction.⁶

Like de Jean, I think it is more useful to replace Vivien in her historical context than to remove her from it. In this chapter I shall be taking another look at her lesbian Sapphic narrative and setting it alongside the predominantly male-authored historical texts discussed in chapters so far; as we shall see, Vivien's Lesbianism offered itself as the subversive underside of the homosexual Hellenism with which it was contemporaneous.⁷

³ Karla Jay, Introduction to her own and Yvonne M. Klein's translation of Renée Vivien, *The Woman of the Wolf and Other Stories* (New York, 1983), p. ii.

⁴ Introduction to Renée Vivien, *At the Sweet Hour of Hand in Hand*, trans. Sandia Belgrade (Tallahassee, 1979), p. xviii. Further references will be included in the text.

⁵ Elyse Blankley, 'Return to Mytilène: Renée Vivien and the City of Women', in Susan Merrill Squier (ed.), *Women Writers and the City: Essays in Feminist Literary Criticism* (Knoxville, 1984), p. 46.

⁶ Joan de Jean, *Fictions of Sappho, 1546-1937* (Chicago and London, 1989).

⁷ Throughout this chapter I shall be intending a distinction - though often, as here, a rather slippery one - between 'sapphic' and 'Sapphic', and 'lesbian' and 'Lesbian', in which only the former terms in each case unequivocally signify female homosexuality. The latter imply 'of or pertaining to Sappho, and the island of Lesbos', respectively.

But I shall also be looking, where few modern commentators have looked, *beyond* Vivien's recuperation of Sappho - beyond indeed all the Sapphic fictions of the major female modernists - to more obscure turn-of-the-century lesbian texts, which deploy the Sapphic model in a very different way.

I want to begin, however, by exploring the long-standing and highly-charged debate on Sappho's sexual biography to which all modern versions of Sappho - and particularly, perhaps, the ones discussed in this chapter - implicitly contribute.

Contending Forces: Sappho's sexual biography

Although, as Emma Donoghue has demonstrated, Sappho has figured as a tribadic model within British culture since at least the early eighteenth century,⁸ and though today Sappho's lesbian status is popularly taken for granted, the homosexual version constitutes only one of the wide variety of narratives - what de Jean has called the *Fictions* of Sappho - through which the poetess of Lesbos has, over the past five centuries, been reconstructed and reconstrued. Many of these present her as a paradigm of *heterosexual* profligacy, a courtesan or fallen woman; most - including many of those which recognise her lesbian interests - follow Ovid's *Heroides* to describe her ignoble succumbing to heterosexual passion for the faithless ferryman, Phaon, and her subsequent suicide. In the second half of the nineteenth century, popular and academic interest in Sappho intensified. Archaeological discoveries - of new papyri manuscripts in 1897, for example - galvanised scholarly Sapphic commentary, but, typically, only fired the controversy surrounding Sappho's personal and literary eros. Drastic cultural changes - the emergence of the women's movement, the emergence in particular of new discourses of homosexual desire - rendered Sappho's controversial example vulnerable to reconstruction by radicals and conservatives alike. A specifically lesbian Lesbian vocabulary - hitherto available, as Donoghue points out, only in isolated "[p]ockets of knowledge about possibilities for eroticism between women" (6) - was receiving lexical and sexological recognition by the

⁸ Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women: British lesbian culture 1669-1801* (London, 1993). Further references will be included in the text.

1890s, but would remain unstable for some time;⁹ "Lesbic", for example, appears as an adjective for "female homosexual" in the *Dictionary of Psychological Medicine* of 1892 - and, as Judith Hallett notes, Joyce would use the word, in *Ulysses*, as late as 1922.¹⁰

In the decades leading up to the turn of the century this lexical conflation of Sappho, Lesbos, Lesbia and lesbianism was compounded by a variety of influential texts. These included paintings - Simeon Solomon's *Sappho and Erinna in the Garden of Mytilene* (1864); poems - Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* (originally entitled *Les lesbiennes*) (1857), Swinburne's 'Anactoria' (1866), Verlaine's *Les Amies, Scènes d'Amour Sapphique* (1867; reprinted in *Parallèlement*, 1884); novels - Swinburne's *Lesbia Brandon* (written in the 1860s but not, of course, published until 1952); and pornography - 'E.D.'s *La Comtesse de Lesbos* (1889), for example, and *Lesbia, Maîtresse d'Ecole* (1891), which features Lesbia Chattemite, corrupt headmistress of a girls' school in "Mitylène". But, while Sappho was claimed by this distinct, predominantly French, literary movement as an icon of perverse or libertine pleasures, elsewhere in the literature of Europe and America she retained her status as paradigmatic female poet to whose name honour, rather than calumny, was attached.¹¹ This seems to

⁹ Donoghue has found evidence of "Lesbian" being used as an adjective, and even as a noun, in the sense of 'woman-loving woman' as early as the 1730s in Britain, and notes the appearance of "Sapphic" and "Sapphist" in the late eighteenth century (*Passions Between Women*, pp. 3-4). While de Jean finds "saphisme" in French dictionaries of 1838 (*Fictions*, p. 245), the sapphic paradigm does not seem to have attracted the attention of British lexicographers until the end of the last century; A. Barrère, for example, in his *Argot and Slang: A New French and English Dictionary of the Cant Words, Quaint Expressions, Slang Terms and Flash Phrases Used in the High and Low Life of Old and New Paris* (London, 1887) notes the French "Lesbienne" but, translating it as a "literary" term for a "female who has unnatural intercourse with those of her own sex", finds no equivalent English Sapphic noun (though he does, curiously, record the word's masculine form - "Lesbien" - which he translates as "Sodomist, or 'gentleman of the back door'": a very rare instance, surely, of the discourse of female homosexuality influencing that of male). As Judith Hallett points out, the *National Medical Dictionary* of 1890 features both "Lesbian love" and "Sapphism" - but, once again, these words describe the sapphic act, not the individual (Judith P. Hallett, 'Sappho and Her Social Context: Sense and Sensuality', in *Signs*, 4 (3) (Spring 1979), pp. 447-64, p. 451). For "lesbian" as a noun, a signifier of identity, we have to turn - interestingly enough - to a slang dictionary of the the 1890s: John S. Farmer and W. E. Henley's *Slang and Its Analogues* (London, 1890-1904), which defines "Lesbian" as "A fellatrix of women", and notes that the word derives from "the legend of Sappho and the women of Lesbos".

Krafft-Ebing, in *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1892), refers to "Sapphic love" and "Lesbian love" (but, keeping them in inverted commas, retains their idiomatic status); Havelock Ellis, in *Sexual Inversion* (1897 - the volume for which, as we saw in chapter 1, Symonds identified a lesbian Sappho), also uses the word "Lesbianism".

¹⁰ Hallett, 'Sappho and Her Social Context', p. 452.

¹¹ Similarly, in the decades following the composition of *Lesbia Brandon*, a variety of popular novels featuring heroines called Lesbia would make none of the sapphic identifications which had so stimulated Swinburne. See, for example, Anna Steele's *Lesbia* (1896), Bessie Marchant's *Lesbia's Little Blunder*

have been particularly true in the United States, where, perhaps, the very explicit new French fictions had been less influential; 'Stella' (Estelle Lewis), author of *Sappho: A Tragedy* (1875), was dubbed by her reviewers "the Sappho of America", just as Katherine Philips before her had been the "English Sappho", and Madeleine de Scudéry the "French Sappho". Any risqué associations acquired by the name by the end of the century in North America seem to have been strictly heterosexual ones. The titular heroine of Robert Appleton's "realistic novel of Bohemia" of 1894, *Violet, the American Sappho*, is an ironically promiscuous one; Sappho Clark, the heroine of *Contending Forces* (1900), by early African-American novelist Pauline Hopkins, is a charismatic black woman with a secret history of seduction and abandonment.

By the early twentieth century, in other words, even at the moment when Sappho's sexual identity was on the brink of acquiring the exclusively lesbian resonance it enjoys today, the range of Sapphic narratives was, paradoxically, at its broadest. Strikingly, the trajectory of these narratives does not necessarily bear any relation to the gender of their authors. Men, as de Jean points out, have written texts in which Sappho, the paradigmatic arrogator of literary and sexual privilege, has been vilified, heterosexualised, abused and, above all, silenced; but they have also produced influential literary paradigms - *Les Fleurs du mal*, 'Anactoria', Pierre Louÿs' *Les Chansons de Bilitis* (1895) - in which Sappho figures as explicitly lesbian. Women have identified Sappho as a powerful feminist foremother (in Catherine Dawson's epic poem *Sappho* [1889], for example, she shocks the conservative Lesbians with her radical plans for female education, and looks in hope across the centuries for the "nobler race" who will make her dreams a reality¹²) but they have also preserved the heterosexualising Phaon myth. Zoë Akins and Sara Teasdale weave their Sapphic poetry into the kind of network of literary and historical female bonds they enjoyed in real life, but ignore Sappho's lesbian status and maintain her in her traditional pose of jilted lover and suicide.¹³ Marion Osborne's *Sappho and Phaon* of

(1934) and Angela Brazil's *Loyal to the School* (1921), which features the hapless schoolgirl heroine Lesbia Ferrars. The name of the titular heroine of Henry Robert S. Dalton's feminist extravaganza *Lesbia Newman: A Novel* (1889), however, is clearly a deliberately loaded one.

¹² C. A. Dawson, *Sappho* (London, 1889), p. 209.

¹³ Teasdale's first volume of poetry, *Sonnets to Duse and Other Poems* (1907), was dedicated to Eleonora Duse; *Helen of Troy and Other Poems* (1911) features poems in the voices of Helen, Beatrice, Marianna Alcforando (the 'Portugese Nun'), Guinevere and Erinna. Akins' *Interpretations: A Book of First Poems* (1912) is dedicated to "My Friend, Julia Marlowe", its Sapphic poem, 'Sappho to a Swallow on the Ground', to Sara Teasdale. Akins was herself a close friend of lesbian writer Willa Cather.

1926 opens with Sappho lamenting the loss of Atthis, but soon has her entreating Aphrodite for the love, not - as in the original 'Ode' - of a female partner, but of the perfidious ferryman. Later Osborne gives *him* the lines ("Equal to the gods seems that man to me") Sappho herself wrote about one woman's erotic speculation of another.¹⁴

And, while male authors have taken a prurient pleasure in constructing an exclusively lesbian Sappho, they have also exploited her ambiguous reputation to give voice to their desires for other *men*. Count Stenbock includes a non gender-specific translation of Sappho's 'Peer of the Gods' fragment amongst the homosexual love poems of his *The Shadow of Death* (1893); Symonds, in his *Memoirs*, takes the first lines of the same fragment out of their lesbian context, to illustrate his desire for Angelo Fusato.¹⁵ Alan Stanley's 'From North to South: Sappho to Alcaeus', which appears alongside the explicit Boy-Love poetry of *Love Lyrics* (1894), seems to ventriloquise a *heterosexual* Sappho: "Ah, bleak is the North and the South is fair,/ And I long for my lover's mouth,/ That kissing him I might lose my care,/ For my love is fair as the fragrant South,/ And wine-red is his red red mouth,/ And gold as sun-set his golden hair".¹⁶ The sapphic idyll of Lesbos may also have provoked the appropriative fantasies of homosexual authors: Symonds writes of the 'Fortunate Isles' in which "Happier men" than he decorate their lovers' brows with laurel and with "passionate pale coral"; Lord Alfred Douglas imagines "an isle in an unfurrowed sea" where "no child-bearing/ Vexes desire".¹⁷ Homosexual writers have, on the whole, found the Sapphic model useful, but possibly also threatening; their interest in it has certainly never equalled that which lesbians have so often brought to the more prestigious paradigm of Greek Love. "Swinburne - faugh!" said a stranger to Symonds once at a Lincoln's Inn dinner. "I can listen to a fellow talking παιδεραστία [paiderastia] - we understand that - but the Lesbian: - little beast!"¹⁸

It is in the context of these proliferating Sapphic narratives, and against the sometimes

¹⁴ Marion Osborne, *Sappho and Phaon: A Lyrical Drama* (Toronto, 1926).

¹⁵ Stanislaus Eric, Count Stenbock, *The Shadow of Death: A Collection of Poems, Songs, and Sonnets* (London, 1893), p. 66. Phyllis Grosskurth (ed.), *The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds* (London, 1984), p. 273.

¹⁶ Alan Stanley, *Love Lyrics* (London, 1894), p. 21.

¹⁷ John Addington Symonds, 'Fortunate Isles', in *Many Moods* (London, 1878), p. 202. Lord Alfred Douglas, 'The Garden of Death', in *Poèmes* (Paris, 1896), p. 52.

¹⁸ Quoted in Phyllis Grosskurth, *John Addington Symonds: A Biography* (London, 1964), p. 121.

conflicting demands of gender and sexuality, that we must place Sappho's turn-of-the-century lesbian collaborators. As in all Sapphic fictions, Sappho's role for lesbians was consistent only in as much as it galvanised them into sexual debate; within that debate she took no standard iconographical form. They responded passionately to Sappho as a literary and historical model, but contributed to her curious and unstable sexual status both by generating their own, radical lesbian texts, and by exploiting the very indeterminacy of her example. I shall be examining work which adopts the latter of these approaches, later; for an example of the first, we must return to Renée Vivien.

Lingerers from Lesbos: Renée Vivien and Natalie Barney

Like so many of the lesbian writers I shall be considering in this thesis, both Vivien and Barney were expatriates, the latter an American, the former of mixed English and American parentage. Both were drawn to the literary and sexual freedoms of France, where they made their homes, and whose language they adopted, in the late 1890s. With their wealth and their charm they fostered a community of creative women; in their own writing they directed new attention towards the female, specifically lesbian, past, which - in volumes like Vivien's *La Dame à la louve* (*The Woman of the Wolf*) (1904) - they teased from the interstices of traditional historical narrative, or simply invented.¹⁹ Ancient Greece, in particular, dominated their homosexual fantasies - fantasies which, like Symonds and Rolfe, they attempted, through prolonged visits and tours, to actualise in the Mediterranean countries of the present. The paucity of Greek lesbian history both limited and intensified their vision: their speculations centred almost exclusively upon the figure of Sappho - whose poetry Vivien elaborately translated in 1903, and to whom her own and Barney's writing makes continual reference - and the island of Lesbos, upon which Vivien even attempted to establish a new Sapphic salon. Their appropriation of Sappho's isle challenged none of the imperialist assumptions of northern Europe - for whom, indeed, the Greek islands have figured as the particular site of territorial contention; but it did reclaim Sappho herself from patriarchal interpretation. Lesbos has

¹⁹ See Karla Jay, *The Amazon and the Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1988), for a good account of Vivien and Barney's life and work.

a more than merely geographical significance in the writings of Vivien and Barney. They refigure it as the site of distinctly female pleasures - "Lesbos, belle Lesbos [...] amante des amies"²⁰ - a landscape of grottoes, bays and spices which is frequently indistinguishable from the topography of lesbian sexual experience itself.

Situated as they were at the crux of British, American and French traditions, in each of which Sappho played a distinct variety of roles, Vivien and Barney were uniquely equipped to exploit and to inflect Sappho's complicated iconographical status. Their work was inspired in part by Henry Wharton's 1885 translation of Sappho's fragments, which had restored the feminine pronoun to the controversial 'Ode to Aphrodite', thus endorsing the homosexual eros of the poem. Vivien and Barney proceeded to reconstruct the lesbian Sappho - whose name they spelt either Sapho, after the French fashion, or Psappha, after the more authentic Aeolian - as explicitly feminist. Vivien's novel, *Une Femme m'apparut* (*A Woman Appeared to Me*) (1904), pours scorn on the myth of Phaon, and the anti-lesbian commentary which endorsed it;²¹ Barney's *Actes et entr'actes* (1910) imagines Sappho suicidal over the love of a faithless *female* lover.²² Their feminist lesbian Sappho thus challenges the two main discursive traditions of which, as we shall see, she was nevertheless the most direct heir: the decadent and the paiderastic.

Vivien's clear alliance with the key male writers of the decadent era has proved to be a stumbling-block for many of her modern lesbian readers, who are uncomfortable with the images of sterility and violence that pervade decadent lesbian fictions. Lilian Faderman, for example, understands Vivien to have internalised anti-lesbian ideology, and regards her poetry as "irrelevant to contemporary lesbians", who have outgrown the "puerile and self-dramatizing aspects of aesthete-decadent literature".²³ Certainly, Vivien inherited a decadent morbidity whose persistent conflation of femininity, female beauty, death and corruption - "I love you because you are ill. I love you because you are going

²⁰ "Lesbos, beautiful Lesbos [...] [female] lover of [female] friends". Trÿphê [pseud. Natalie Barney], *Cinq petits dialogues grecs* (*Five Little Greek Dialogues*) (Paris, 1902), p. 10. All translations of Vivien's and Barney's work, unless otherwise stated, are mine.

²¹ Renée Vivien, *A Woman Appeared to Me*, trans. Jeanette H. Foster (Tallahassee, 1979), pp. 6-7 and 34-5. All quotations from *Une femme* are to this translation, and further page references, where obvious, will be included in the text.

²² De Jean, *Fictions*, p. 284.

²³ Lilian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (London, 1985), pp. 362-3. Further references will be included in the text.

to die'"²⁴ - challenges feminist reclamation; and, as many critics have pointed out, her own death in 1909 eerily echoed that of Swinburne's self-immolating Lesbia Brandon. But I think we need a more sensitive reading of the interdiscursive dynamics of Vivien's texts than that offered by Faderman. Gubar, for example, recognises the unique counter-cultural energy - the "demonic power" - of the decadent lesbian femme fatale, and notes the way in which Vivien exploited *fin-de-siècle* literary preoccupations to find in Sappho a paradigm of artistic endeavour (97). De Jean, perhaps most usefully, points out the crucial *differences* between Vivien and Barney's lesbians - feminist, self-sufficient, inhabitants of a female community - and Baudelaire's isolated *femmes damnées*.²⁵

Vivien's replication of male Sapphic narratives was, clearly, far from uncritical. What decadent discourse offered her was a vocabulary of *desire*: it was valuable precisely because it *did* sexualise women's relationships, and insist upon lesbian sensual experience, in a way that the dominant Anglo-American discourse of female partnerships - the 'romantic friendship' or 'Boston marriage' Faderman has examined in such depth - did not.²⁶ "That I could drink thy veins as wine, and eat/ Thy breasts like honey!" Swinburne's Sappho had apostrophised 'Anactoria' in 1866, "that from face to feet/ Thy body were abolished and consumed,/ And in my flesh thy very flesh entombed!"²⁷ Such language wildly elaborates upon, but at least does not attempt either to sanitise or to heterosexualise, the ardour of Sappho's own verse. The other major emerging discourse of lesbian desire at this time was, of course, the sexological; and as Esther Newton has suggested, many women - women who have also been accused of 'internalising' patriarchal prescription - may have embraced the "mannish lesbian" identity in a similar attempt to sexualise their loving partnerships with other women.²⁸ Embracing decadence, however, Vivien and Barney were able to conceptualise their unorthodox desires beyond the particular somatic parameters of sexological theory. There is little obvious endorsement of inverted or third sex sexual theories in their writings; rather, like the

²⁴ San Giovanni, reciting a prose poem "suggested to me by a morbid nocturne of Chopin", in *A Woman Appeared to Me*, p. 16.

²⁵ De Jean, *Fictions*, p. 285.

²⁶ Cassandra Laity, in 'H.D. and A.C. Swinburne: Decadence and Sapphic Modernism', in Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow (eds.), *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions* (New York, 1990), pp. 217-240, discusses further the empowering influences of Romantic Decadence upon the female modernists.

²⁷ Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Poems and Ballads* (London, 1866), p. 69.

²⁸ Esther Newton, 'The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman', in Freedman et al, *The Lesbian Issue*, pp. 7-25.

paiderastic writers discussed in earlier chapters, they prioritised a gender separatist sexual model - placing "the woman-loving woman [...] at the 'natural' defining centre of [her] own gender, rather than, as gender-integrative models would, at the threshold between genders".²⁹

The links between Vivien's work and paiderastic writing are, indeed, more than superficial. Just as she exploited the energy and new sexual frankness of decadence, so she absorbed and revised the historiographical model made available by the homosexual Hellenists of the late nineteenth century. Like theirs, her utopian speculations were impelled by a desire to revivify ancient erotic practice in "a century less beautiful";³⁰ like them, she and Barney flouted the ontological prescriptions of a heterosexual culture which traces its genealogy literally through previous generations. Communion with the "cunningly unfertile" Sappho³¹ - like the "sweet unfruitful love" of Hellas celebrated by Lord Alfred Douglas³² - is perennially available to the modern devotee:

Certain among us have preserved the rites,
Of burning Lesbos gilded like an altar.
.....
We recite these words of Psappha, while we
Dream beneath a silver sky:
"Beautiful women, towards you my heart will never change"
.....
Psappha lives again and reigns in our quivering bodies.³³

Vivien's lesbian culture, even more than the homosexual tradition imagined by writers like Steyne and Carpenter, reproduces itself by a variety of supernatural means, and overturns progenitive paradigms. San Giovanni, the androgynous "lingerer from Lesbos"

²⁹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Across Gender, Across Sexuality: Willa Cather and Others', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 88 (1989), pp. 53-72, p. 59.
³⁰ Vivien, 'Ainsi je parlerai...' ('Thus Would I Speak'), originally published in *A l'heure des Mains jointes* (1906), reprinted in Vivien, *Poésies Complètes* (Paris, 1986), p. 255.
³¹ Barney, *Cinq petits dialogues grecs*, p. 10. De Jean's translation: *Fictions*, p. 281.
³² Lord Alfred Douglas, 'Hymn to Physical Beauty', in *Poèmes*, p. 6. Douglas had been engaged to Barney in the 1890s - much to the chagrin of her father (which may, as Jay suggests [3], have been Barney's intention). He later married Vivien and Barney's friend Olive Custance, and appears in Vivien's *roman à clef* as the 'Prince' to whom the narrator loses her bisexual lover, Dagmar. See Gayle Rubin's Introduction to Foster's translation of *Une Femme m'apparut*, p. xiii.
³³ Vivien, 'Psappha revit' ('Psappha lives again'), originally published in *A l'heure*, reprinted in *Poésies Complètes*, pp. 252-3. Vivien is here quoting Sappho herself: "To you, fair maids, my mind changes not". Wharton, *Sappho: Memoir, Text, Selected Renderings* (London, 1885), p. 71.

of *A Woman Appeared to Me* (43), imagines she has lived a former life on Sappho's island; Sappho herself, the Lesbian foremother who is also the lesbian lover and the lesbian/feminist sister, is reincarnated in the ostensibly sterile embraces of contemporary women. Vivien, of course - once plain Pauline Tarn, subsequently renamed and Re-née - accomplished her *own* re-birthing.

But while homosexual Hellenism inspired Vivien's historical fantasies, it also resisted appropriation, and required substantial lesbian revision. Where homosexual writers admired the way classical societies incorporated homoerotic bonding into their most basic social structures, Vivien reconstructed Lesbos - the Hellenic island that was nevertheless crucially distanced from the patriarchal city-states of Athens and Sparta - as a place where women could commune, unhindered by men. She responded to her exclusion from the paiderastic paradigm, in other words, by opening up the gynaeceum and eroticising it - not after the manner of Louÿs in *Chansons de Bilitis*, and 'E.D.' in *Lesbia, Maîtresse d'Ecole*, who attempted pruriently to yoke Sappho to the paiderastic model, but with an emphasis upon the "mutuality of eros" which, as de Jean notes, is a feature of Sappho's own verse.³⁴ Vivien's Sappho, and her sapphic representatives, are inspiring *erastes* only in so far as they bring adult women into harmony with their latent lesbian desires: "She who was the incarnation of my Destiny, She who first revealed me to myself, took me by the hand [...] and led me towards the grotto where Psappha's songs enchant the Sirens".³⁵

Indeed, rather than attempting to appropriate the man/boy dynamics of paiderastia, Vivien often undermines them. "'Adolescent boys are beautiful'", claims Vally in *A Woman Appeared to Me*, "'only because they resemble women'";

'they are still inferior to women, whom they do not equal either in grace of movement or harmony of form.'

'For my part,' said San Giovanni thoughtfully, 'I don't believe that any statue of a young god surpasses the winged magnificence of the Victory of Samothrace, that supreme incarnation of feminine beauty. I have a horror of the Hercules. Any Herakles,' she emphasised, 'is the apotheosis of a carnival wrestler or a butcher boy.' (7)

³⁴ De Jean, *Fictions*, p. 21.

³⁵ Renée Vivien, 'Psappha charme les Sirènes' ('Psappha enchants the Sirens'), in *La Dame à la Louve* (Paris, 1977; originally published 1904), p. 167.

However, in defining her aristocratic sapphic model against the more catholic paiderastic paradigm - in which, as we've seen, wrestlers and butcher boys were valued precisely to the extent that they represented the apotheoses of *Herakles* - San Giovanni is really making a virtue of necessity. For if lesbians and gay men have often coincided in their search for historical precedent, they have nevertheless had a very different range of historiographical resources at their disposal. The male homosexual tradition, which commentators traced from Plato to Michelangelo, and from Shakespeare to Winckelmann, both subverted dominant historical narrative and substantially overlapped with it; the paiderastic model of history, in which one generation passes its male privileges onto the next, often seems indistinguishable from the heterosexual. Though Vivien rescued a vast array of admirable women (including Anne Boleyn, Cleopatra, Vashti and Lilith) from patriarchal historical narrative, she had none of the resources of homosexual men for imagining herself as a participant in an unbroken sexual tradition: access to the Sapphic original could only be spontaneous, unmediated, mystical. Where Wilde, Summers and others identified a range of paiderastic icons, many of them Biblical, Vivien claims a matriarchal, effectively pre- or a-historic, ancestry: "I beg your pardon, I who am only a simple pagan!" she tells a disapproving Christ in 'Ainsi je parlerai...' ('Thus Would I Speak...'); "Let me return to the ancient splendour/ And, when eternity finally comes,/ Rejoin those [celles-là] who never knew you at all."³⁶ The *re* prefix is a prominent one in Vivien's Sapphic writing; if Sappho herself haunts the passionate embraces of modern lesbians, then the visitor to Lesbos is always also a kind of *revenant*: "From the depths of my past I return to you,/ Mytilene, across the disparate centuries".³⁷

As we shall see in later chapters, Vivien's fantasy of transhistorical feminist communion would be shared by subsequent generations of lesbian authors attempting to span the lacunae of lesbian history; as we've already seen, feminist writers of the '70s and '80s celebrated Vivien's restoration of what was apparently the original, woman-centred eros of Sappho's own poetry, and welcomed what they understood to be the recuperation of Sappho from patriarchal misconstruction: "Sappho did after all", Belgrade points out in

³⁶ Vivien, 'Ainsi je parlerai...', *Poésies Complètes*, p. 256.

³⁷ Vivien, 'En débarquant à Mytilène' ('Landing at Mytilene'), originally published in *A l'heure*, republished in *Poésies Complètes*, p. 268.

her Introduction to *At the Sweet Hour*, "incorporate her love for women into an actual, living community where the relationship between mortal love and goddess worship was real as well as ideal" (xvi). Offering a more resisting reading of Vivien's work, I have tried to expose hers as one of many turn-of-the-century Sapphos: a rebellious icon whose genealogy can nevertheless be traced through a variety of discourses, and who, like all icons, satisfied very specific cultural requirements.

Where the elusive and chimerical Sappho is concerned, this resisting or interrogative reading is the most useful - indeed, the only really appropriate one. As de Jean has shown, Sappho's biography as well as her work is a tissue of fragments and speculation. Few of the details of her life can be traced to reliable sources; the erotic orientation of her verses is, in some cases, not assured, in others far from revealing about the sexual identity of the poet herself.³⁸ It is, of course, her essential absence that has precisely facilitated the multiplicity of Sapphic fictions; but the fact of Sappho's insubstantiality also means that no one Sapphic version is truer than any other: they are all, sapphic and anti-sapphic alike, to some extent falsifications. I am referring here to versions of Sappho's *person*, not of her *work* - which has certainly been consistently destroyed, obscured, mistranslated and misrepresented by commentators anxious about the model of female erotic bonding it seems to celebrate. But even in her own poetry, Sappho seems deliberately to frustrate expectation: de Jean, for example, noting the ambiguity and 'polyphonic' quality of Sapphic verse, emphasises Sappho's "consistent refusal to be confined within stable definitions of gender and sexual identity".³⁹ With this in mind, we might class as the most 'authentic' Sapphic fiction one which similarly foregrounded the semantic ambiguity both of its subject and of itself. Production of such a fiction was, clearly, never the aim of Vivien and Barney; I suggest we look for it instead in the work of another literary partnership, that of Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper, who lived together as loving companions from the 1870s until Cooper's death in 1913, and who wrote poetry and plays together as 'Michael Field'.

³⁸ See de Jean, *Fictions*, pp. 319-20, for details of the controversy surrounding the erotic definition of Sappho's 'Ode to Aphrodite'. See also André Lardinois, 'Lesbian Sappho and Sappho of Lesbos', in Jan Bremmer (ed.), *From Sappho to de Sade: Moments in the History of Sexuality* (London and New York, 1989), pp. 15-35. Lardinois offers a good analysis of all the available information and concludes that there's no definite evidence either for or against Sappho's lesbianism; perhaps most pertinently, he points out that to apply such anachronistic sexual categories to Sappho is, ultimately, nonsensical.

³⁹ De Jean, *Fictions*, p. 22.

Taking maiden pleasure unespied: Michael Field

Like Vivien and Barney, Bradley and Cooper were inspired to write their own Sapphic lyrics by Henry Wharton's *Sappho: Memoir, Text, Selected Renderings* of 1885. Wharton's volume, as we've seen, contains a translation of Sappho's 'Ode to Aphrodite' in which the erotic orientation of the poem is established as definitely lesbian; but what is demonstrated by the volume - in which Wharton gives the Greek originals of all Sappho's fragments, translates them into his own prose versions, and follows these with a variety of earlier translations, all subtly different from one another - is the very instability of Sapphic interpretation. Just as Vivien would at the turn of the century, Bradley and Cooper saw in the absence of a definitive Sapphic corpus room for their own lyrical elaborations. Their *Long Ago* of 1889 is a series of sixty-eight poems which translate, complete, elaborate and sometimes combine Sappho's original verses, assuming her voice; around the Greek fragments Bradley and Cooper weave an elaborate fiction, the details of which they take from Sapphic tradition, from Sapphic scholarship, and from their own sapphic fantasies.

Recent commentators have been eager to reclaim Bradley and Cooper for lesbian literary history, but, alert to the lack of explicit homosexual identification in their public and personal writing, have argued over the extent of their relevance to it. Faderman, noting the constancy of their affection, and the passionate vocabulary with which they referred to it, understands their relationship as a loving and sensual, but probably not sexual, 'romantic friendship'.⁴⁰ Chris White, however, deplores Faderman's unwillingness to admit a sexual dimension to pre-twentieth century female partnerships; her more flexible reading of Bradley and Cooper - who referred to themselves as "married", and who addressed one another as Michael and Henry - exposes the limits of Faderman's historiographical model.⁴¹ Wayne Koestenbaum is unequivocal in his presentation of the poets' lesbianism; even their Catholic conversions, he claims, fostered

⁴⁰ Faderman, *Surpassing*, pp. 208-13.

⁴¹ Chris White, "'Poets and Lovers evermore': the poetry and journals of Michael Field", in Joseph Bristow (ed.), *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing* (London and New York, 1992), pp. 26-43. Further references will be included in the text.

rather than troubled their unorthodox bond: "the two women thrived in that religious demi-monde that protected lesbian and gay writers from disclosure".⁴² These critics offer correspondingly different interpretations of *Long Ago*. While Faderman feels the volume "gives little hint of any consciousness about the possibility of sexual expression between women" (210), both White and Koestenbaum understand it to be more or less what the latter calls "explicitly lesbian poetry" (173).

Like White, I would seek to challenge Faderman's reading of *Long Ago* by drawing attention to those poems which seem to describe erotic encounters between women. These poems alternate with others which depict Sappho in her traditional pose, maddened by love and suicidal with unreciprocated heterosexual desire, and draw upon an alternative tradition of Sapphic interpretation. Poem XXXV, for example, transforms a single line - "Foolish woman, pride not thyself on a ring"⁴³ - into a lesbian mini-drama:

Come, Gorgo, put the rug in place,
 And passionate recline;
 I love to see thee in thy grace,
 Dark, virulent, divine.
 But wherefore thus thy proud eyes fix
 Upon a jewelled band?
 Art thou so glad the sardonyx
 Becomes thy shapely hand?

Bethink thee! 'Tis for such as thou
 Zeus leaves his lofty seat;
 'Tis at thy beauty's bidding how
 Man's mortal life shall fleet;
 Those fairest hands - dost thou forget
 Their power to thrill and cling?
 O foolish woman, dost thou set,
 Thy pride upon a ring?⁴⁴

Other poems seem, similarly, to take both passion and betrayal between women for granted. In XIV Sappho assures Atthis that "Queen Dawn shall find us on one bed" (22); in XLIV, however, she laments Atthis' loss. In XLVI, into which Bradley and Cooper

⁴² Wayne Koestenbaum, *Double Talk: The erotics of male literary collaboration* (New York and London, 1989), p. 173. Further references will be included in the text.

⁴³ Wharton's translation: *Sappho*, p. 84.

⁴⁴ Michael Field [pseud. Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper], *Long Ago* (London, 1889), p. 56. Further references will be included in the text.

weave Sappho's 'Peer of the Gods' fragment, Sappho describes her feelings of apprehension at encountering her former lovers - all women - who have left her for other partners. Less explicit poems seem still to invite lesbian interpretation by their use of suggestive imagery. Many of these, like Sappho's own poetry, prioritise the *visual*; in some, Sappho enjoys gazing at women engaged in sensual tasks - at the garland-weaving Dica, in poem XIII, for example:

Dica, the Graces oft incline
To watch thy fingers' skill
As with light foliage they entwine
The aromatic dill:
Then seek the fount where feathery,
Young shoots and tendrils creep. (20)

Throughout the volume, indeed, there is a subtle conflation of plant - usually rose - imagery and female erotic detail. This is true particularly of the many poems in which Sappho's interest in her companions is presented not as passionate, but as maternal or pedagogic - as, for example, in poem LIV:

What praises would be best
Wherewith to crown my girls?
The rose when she unfurls
Her balmy, lighted buds is not so good,
So fresh as they
When on my breast
They lean, and say
All that they would,
Opening their glorious, candid maidenhood. (96)

Ostensibly, the scenario of female *philia* invoked here is not lesbian, but that of the gynaeceum; traditionally, of course, Sappho was thought have run a school or literary seminary for girls at Mytilene. But, as in libertine or pornographic versions of Sappho (as, precisely, in E.D.'s *Lesbia, Maîtresse d'Ecole*), the discourses of pedagogy and sexual love are, actually, confused: the imagery is vaginal, and inviting - note especially the final slip the reader is almost compelled to make between 'maidenhood' and its quite different shadow-word, 'maidenhead'. This poem witnesses the convergence of very different Sapphic narratives - a convergence which Bradley and Cooper, lovers who were also aunt and niece, may have taken a private pleasure in fostering.

However, noting the gynocentric erotic detail of poems like this is, I think, about as far as we can reasonably go in attempting a lesbian reading of them. White, quoting part of the next (last) stanza of this particular poem - "No girls let fall/ Their maiden zone/ At Hymen's call" - claims that the relationship between Sappho and her girl companions "is premised upon a need to keep the women away from marriage" (30); but the stanza as a whole is really saying something rather different about Sappho's responsibilities to her pupils:

To that pure band alone
I sing of marriage-loves;
As Aphrodite's doves
Glance in the sun their colour comes and goes:
No girls let fall
Their maiden zone
At Hymen's call
Serene as those
Taught by a poet why sweet Hesper glows. (96)

Sappho wants to make *good* wives out of her maidens, not to keep them away from men; many of the poems, indeed, present her less as the head of a female community in which she has a nurturing, possibly erotic, interest, than as a mature, embittered woman seeking comfort in the affection of her pupils precisely because it is pre-pubescent, non-sexual, and finite:

Not Gello's self loves more than I
The virgin train, my company.
No thought of Eros doth appal
Their cheek; their strong, clear eyes let fall
No tears; they dream their days will be
All laughter, love, serenity,
And violet-weaving at my knee -
.....
Fell Cypris, if thou must prevail,
Mingle no madness in love's wine;
That these should e'er as Sappho pine,
Goddess forbid! The little thing
From Telos must be taught to sing;
The rest to Hymen's portals bring!
(XXVI, 42-3)

These poems seem to understand erotic friendships to be something that girls - like Leto and Niobe in the re-telling of their story, poem LVI - will enjoy with each other when

they are young, but that they will naturally forsake when they reach (hetero)sexual maturity:

Leto and Niobe were friends full dear
 [...but]
 Leto and Niobe were virgins then,
 Nor knew the strange,
 Deep-severing change
 That comes to women when
 Elected, raised above
 All else, they thrill with love,
 The love of gods or men. (99)

Similarly poem LII, a re-telling of the myth of Tiresias, celebrates the "mystic raptures of the bride". White finds in this poem "a positive valuing of women" (32); but what the poem really seems to be valuing is heterosexual sex. When Tiresias, who lived seven years of his life in a woman's body, was consulted by Zeus and Hera as to which partner, in marriage, received the greater sexual pleasure, he claimed that women received ten times as much satisfaction as men - a response that so enraged Hera, who rather prided herself on her sexual skills, that she blinded him on the spot. In Bradley and Cooper's poem, as in Tiresias' reply, vaginal candour seems to find its complement not in the sapphic gaze, but in phallic vigour:

Deep-bosomed Queen, fain wouldst thou hide
 The mystic raptures of the bride!
 When man's strong nature draweth nigh
 'Tis as the lightning to the sky,
 The blast to idle sail, the thrill
 Of springtide when the sapling's fill.
 Though fragrant breath the sun receives
 From the young rose's softening leaves,
 Her plaited petals once undone
 The rose herself receives the sun. (90-1).

To passages like this White, who applauds the unusual degree of sexual agency allowed Bradley and Cooper's Sappho, and idealises the female bonds in the gynaeceum poems, makes no reference at all.

I raise these points not to attack White's essay - which gives a fine and, on the whole, careful lesbian reading of Bradley and Cooper's text, and airs some important

lesbian historiographical issues - but to argue that, in the face of these blatant and puzzling celebrations of heterosexual eros, a lesbian reading of *Long Ago* must break down; that to attempt to sustain such a reading inevitably involves the reader in a kind of falsification of the text. But if the volume frustrates lesbian expectation then neither, of course, does it lend itself to *heterosexual* appropriation: like Sappho's own poetry - and, to a certain extent, like Bradley and Cooper's own relationship - it *resists* categorisation. The most appropriate reading of *Long Ago*, perhaps, is one that would both take full account of the text's ambiguities, and acknowledge its own provisionality.

The juxtaposition of heterosexual and lesbian poems in *Long Ago* is one of the ways in which the text confounds a monologic reading. In many cases the relationship *between* poems is at least as important as the poems themselves - between LXVI, for example, in which Sappho, "Abandoned, vengeful, covetous" (123), mourns the errant Phaon, and LXVII, in which, through her "hungry, sore,/ Death-stricken senses" (124), she experiences the loss of her long-dead female lover, Atthis. Elsewhere, individual poems invoke mythical scenarios only strangely to re-work them; or recall those very myths and legends in which gender categories are exploded or confused. Poem LX retells the story of Leda, whose daughter, Helen of Troy, was born in an egg, after Leda had been raped by Zeus in the form of a swan. In Bradley and Cooper's version, the rape is elided; in the pleasure Leda derives from her daughter's conception and birth, Zeus is curiously absent:

She loved the perfumed inlet; in the spring
The swans were wont to sail to her and sing -
Leda, there was a bird of lustrous wing!
And there one day she found, 'tis said
An egg hid in the hyacinth bed.

She stooped, and looked down at it with delight
And wonder; 'twas so much, ah, much more white
Than any ever seen before, and right
Against the purple buds was prest
As in a very blossom-nest.

She watched the leafy clusters as they grew,
And smelt the flowers, and with her fingers drew
The arching stalks together, from men's view
To hide the egg, and kept about
The spot till every bunch was out,

And deep in bloom the glistening thing was laid.
 'But soon,' she thought, 'the crowded flowers will fade!'
 And, as she peered down anxious, from the shade
 A lovely, laughing child looked up
 With lips just parted from a cup

Of nectarous blossom-honey that still dript. (109-10)

This poem brings together an extraordinary variety of images - the "perfumed inlet", the clitoral "egg" "prest" against "purple buds", the "leafy clusters", parted lips and dripping "blossom-honey" - so redolent of female sexual delight I scarcely need to gloss them here. But, like Selene, the virgin moon-goddess in poem LIX who sends the handsome mortal Endymion into an eternal swoon so that she can "spen[d]/ Her virgin frenzy innocent", take "her maiden pleasure unespied" (107), Leda's auto-eroticism, though necessarily female-centred, is not reducible to either a homo- or a hetero- sexual identity; her relationship with the precocious infant Helen resists classification as either wholly maternal or purely erotic but, once again, encompasses them both.

Similarly the trans^ssexual Tiresias, who, as we've seen, is invoked to extol the delights of heterosexual sex, is himself a far from orthodox sexual exemplar. The erotics of LII are further confused by the extraordinary chain of sexual ventriloquisms involved in its production - female lovers (who used men's names) writing as a man writing as Sappho writing about a man who was turned into a woman and back into a man! - which ensure that its celebration of female heterosexual pleasure is qualified by a destabilisation of gender and sexual categorisation itself. The influence of the 'Michael Field' authorship upon our interpretation of these Sapphic lyrics should, indeed, be an important one. In 'his' Preface to *Long Ago* Field writes that "I have turned to the one woman who has dared to speak unfalteringly of the fearful mastery of love, and again and again the dumb prayer has risen from my heart - σὺ δ' αὐτὰ σύμμαχος ἔσσο ['be thyself my ally'⁴⁵]" (iii). White understands this to be another form of Sapphic collaboration: "In order to speak 'unfalteringly' of woman's love for woman," she writes, "it is necessary for Michael Field to work in alliance with other women and other women's formulations of such love" (33). As we have seen, however, the most influential sapphic fictions of the

⁴⁵ Wharton's translation: *Sappho*, p. 46. The line comes from the end of Sappho's 'Ode to Aphrodite', in which the poet apparently asks for the goddess' help in securing the affections of another woman.

nineteenth century were those of male authors - authors who, like Field, often ventriloquised or claimed a special intimacy with Sappho herself ("For Lesbos chose me among all on the earth", wrote Baudelaire in 'Lesbos', "To sing the secret of its budding virgins"⁴⁶), and who sometimes used the Sapphic setting to explore their own homoerotic fantasies.⁴⁷ We could read Field, then, as a male persona working primarily with *men's* formulations of lesbian passion - not to revise them in an act of feminist protest, but to compound and exploit their sexual ambiguities. As we saw in chapter 3, as 'Arran and Isla Leigh' Bradley and Cooper had similarly colonised the topoi of homosexual fantasy eight years before their collaboration on *Long Ago*, in 'Apollo's Written Grief'.

Like Vivien and Barney, Bradley and Cooper were attracted to ancient Greece as the site of *possibility*; undoubtedly, their self-identification as female lovers in a patriarchal culture - lesbian or otherwise - made vital to them the fostering of such an imaginative space. The Sapphic eros that emerges from *Long Ago*, however, is indeterminable: less the keynote of a new Sapphic tradition, than the product of a careful conflation of them all.

While Michael Field's sexually equivocal Sappho could never have inspired the Sapphic modernisms - of Cather, Woolf, H.D., Yourcenar and others - of which, rightly, Vivien and Barney have been acclaimed as foremothers, she may still have provided subsequent generations of lesbian writers with an influential model. In a further attempt to expand our sense of the role Sappho may have had for her literary 'collaborators', I want to end this chapter by considering two texts that are far less illustrious than those to which Sapphic commentators usually turn. The first of these is the 1908 'Ode to Sappho' which, having been written by the most famous literary lesbian after Sappho herself - Radclyffe Hall - would seem to beg uncomplicated lesbian interpretation. The second is a small volume of poems or *Rhapsodies*, published by an unknown author under the name "Sappho" in 1901. "Sappho"'s poems, like those of 'Michael Field', seem simultaneously to invite and frustrate lesbian appropriation.

⁴⁶ De Jean's translation, *Fictions*, p. 353.

⁴⁷ For more on this, see Isabelle de Courtivron's 'Weak Men and Fatal Women: The Sand Image', in Stambolian and Marks, *Homosexualities and French Literature*, pp. 210-27.

Love's Last Queen: Radclyffe Hall and "Sappho"

'Ode to Sappho' was published in *A Sheaf of Verses*, one of Hall's earliest collections of poetry, of which she published five between 1906 and 1915.⁴⁸ It is difficult for us to imagine the pre-*Well of Loneliness* Hall who wrote these poems - living, to be sure, a lesbian lifestyle, but with literary reputation unmarked by homosexual scandal. To her most unambiguously lesbian later texts - *The Unlit Lamp* (1924), 'Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself' (1926) and, of course, *The Well* (1928) - possibly only *The Forgotten Island* (1915) really gestures. Like *Long Ago*, it is a series of numbered rather than titled Greek-style pagan lyrics, some of which are also love-songs addressed to women:

Artemis, Artemis, why fliest thou?
Mine arms would encompass thy timorous limbs,
My kisses rivet a chain for thy feet!⁴⁹

Pierre Louÿs had made this kind of thing fashionable with his notorious *Chansons de Bilitis*, a volume with many imitations, among them *The Love of Myrrhine and Konallis* (published in 1926 but written in the 1910s) by H.D.'s husband, Richard Aldington.⁵⁰ But *The Forgotten Island* was clearly something of an experiment for Hall; on the whole her poetry is far less adventurous, the romantic scenarios it invokes typically English: the first half of *Songs of Three Counties and Other Poems*, for example, entitled 'Rustic Courting', is a long series of poems in which a country boy celebrates the charms of his sweetheart. Hall seems at home in a masculine persona; though her love poems are rarely gender-specific - most refer to "you", "I" and "we" - those which draw attention to the beloved's hair, eyes, lips, skin etc., seem to code their object, at least, as implicitly female. In the light of her subsequent fiction, it is hard to resist making a lesbian reading of these early poems, notwithstanding the heterosexual romantic tradition into which they so obviously fit. Like Vivien and Barney, Hall seems to have appropriated literary genre

⁴⁸ These were: *'Twixt Earth and Stars* (1906), *A Sheaf of Verses* (1908), *Poems of the Past and Present* (1910), *Songs of Three Counties* (1913) and *The Forgotten Island* (1915).

⁴⁹ Marguerite Radclyffe-Hall, poem XXXIII, in *The Forgotten Island* (London, 1915), p. 42.

⁵⁰ Jeanette Foster, in *Sex Variant Women in Literature* (Tallahassee, 1985), cites as other *Bilitis* imitations Henry Rigal's *Sur le Mode Sapphique* (1902) and the *Auf Kypros* of Marie Madeleine (Baroness von Puttkamer) (1898). See also Evadne Lascaris' *The Golden Bed of Kydno* (New York, 1935).

for her own ends. Where they may have been attracted to France both because its literature offered them a discourse of lesbianism and because its heavily gendered language allowed the creation of a specifically lesbian literary economy, Hall seems to have sheltered her poems in a neuter style, and enjoyed their implications privately. (The narrator of ‘Willow Wand’, for example, in *Songs of Three Counties*, seeks “a fairy home” in which to dwell with “the ladye of my heart”; ‘Ladye’ was, of course, the soubriquet of Mabel Batten, Hall’s lover between 1908 and 1916.⁵¹)

Like Vivien’s ‘Psappha Lives Again’, however, Hall’s ‘Ode to Sappho’ attempts explicitly to re-vivify the Lesbian poet for her modern admirers. The poem is rather too long to reproduce in its entirety here, but worth quoting at length:

Immortal Lesbian! canst thou still behold
 From some far sphere wherein thy soul doth sing
This earth, that once was thine, while glimmered gold
 The joyous beams of youth’s forgotten spring?

.....

Canst thou forget us who are still thy friends,
 Thy lovers, o’er the cloudy gulf of years?
Who live, and love, and dying make amends
 For life’s short pleasures thro’ death’s endless fears?

Once thou didst seek the solace of thy kind,
 The madness of a kiss was more to thee
Than Heaven or Hell, the greatness of thy mind
 Could not conceive more potent ecstasy!

.....

Oh! Sappho, sister, by that agony
 Of soul and body hast thou gained a place
Within each age that shines majestic’ly
 Across the world from out the dusk of space.

Not thy deep pleasures, nor thy swiftest joys,
 Have made thee thus, immortal and yet dear
To mortal hearts, but that which naught destroys,
 The sacred image of thy falling tear.

⁵¹ Marguerite Radclyffe-Hall, *Songs of Three Counties* (London, 1913), p. 53-4.

Beloved Lesbian! we would dare to claim
 By that same tear fond union with thy lot;
 Yet 'tis enough, if when we breathe thy name
 Thy soul but listens, and forgets us not.⁵²

As in Vivien's writing, there is a desire here to cross "the cloudy gulf of years": a claiming of kinship with Sappho; the assertion of a bond through which both Sappho and the speaker are in some way *defined*. What the speaker identifies with, however, is not Sappho's pleasure, but her strangely ambiguous *passion*, which is initially that of the over-sensual lover, then that of the outcast soul, but ultimately that of the saviour or saint who achieves immortality through pain. Her agony is shared only partly by her earthly emulators, who are both pleasure-seekers and, like her, weeping, but for whom she constitutes the deity of an alternative faith - a faith which deploys a Christian vocabulary of ritual, suffering and love, but offers its practitioners a haven from the orthodox rhetoric of erotic transgression. Hall's Sappho is, in short, a rather uncanny precursor of that more notorious lesbian martyr, Stephen Gordon; she, too, loves "deeply, far more deeply" than the heterosexual lover, and has a correspondingly "endless capacity for suffering".⁵³

The sapphic resonance of Hall's ode, however, is a product precisely of the *extra-textual* lesbian details a post-*Well of Loneliness* reading brings to it: the poem itself does little more than make room in our reading for some of the sexual ambiguity which, by 1908, had become the keynote of Sappho's collective biography. The fact that the ode is prefaced with a quotation from Ovid's *Heroic Epistle*, indeed, in which Sappho laments the lost Phaon, would seem to define Sappho's angst as misplaced heterosexual eros: Hall may have seen in Sappho's story an appropriate parable of the contest between sensual pleasure and spiritual pain regardless of the poet's own sexual orientation. Sappho's desire is nevertheless curiously objectless; the ambiguous "thy kind", moreover, in the third stanza I have reproduced, might mean that Sappho found sexual comfort with a partner of similar, passionate temperament - or it might mean she found it with someone of the same sex, or of the same (homo) sexual *nature*. The reiteration of "Lesbian!", too - a

⁵² Marguerite Radclyffe-Hall, *A Sheaf of Verses* (London, 1908), pp. 36-8. Further references to this volume will be included in the text.

⁵³ Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (London, 1982; originally published 1928), p. 145.

word which was retaining its purely geographical significance only in the most naive, self-censoring or academic contexts - seems telling; yet Hall may ultimately simply have been *exploiting* semantic indeterminacy to produce a coded lesbian effect. By such means the particular Sapphic "friends" she perhaps had in mind - the gender of whom Vivien, writing in French, would have been obliged to make explicit - might have found in this poem a particular pertinence; but we, like them, can only speculate.

Claiming *Rhapsodies* as a lesbian text demands from us a quite different interpretative strategy. We may never know whether "Sappho" was male or female, let alone hetero- or homosexual. Several of the poems' internal features - including, as we shall see, an addressing of Sappho as the speaker's "sister" - hint at a feminine identification, at least, on the poet's part; and whereas, as we've seen, female Sapphic fiction-makers have often been re-named, or named themselves, after the poet of Lesbos, it does seem unlikely - though not impossible (especially in the light of the trans-gender ventriloquisms of Symonds and Stanley) - that a *male* writer would identify with Sappho to the extent of adopting her name as a *nom de plume*. But whatever the sex of its author, *Rhapsodies*, like 'Michael Field's *Long Ago*, is a curious and suggestive volume; the blatant provisionality of its authorship - that "Sappho", at once prestigious and hackneyed, placed moreover within double inverted commas - offers us, perhaps, some clue as to how this text should be read.

Like the sentimental, often mawkish, poems of Hall, "Sappho's" rhapsodies - for the most part love lyrics - would probably fail to charm the literary epicure; again like Hall's, however, they seem to test the very limits of the romantic clichés they invoke. The first poem, '1901', appears to dedicate the whole collection to a woman - to "my sweet sea maid"⁵⁴ - and in 'Sea-Song', similarly, the beloved - "like some strange sweet flower" (36) - seems implicitly female. In 'The Kiss', however - "The first kiss, Love! - upon my little hand,/ That trembled somewhat 'neath the longed-for touch" (20) - it is the *speaker* who is coded feminine; later love poems avoid sexual specification altogether - seem to make a point, in fact, of addressing the beloved in non-gender-specific terms: "my love" (22), "sweetheart" (25), "my sweet!" (36) or, most gratuitously evasive, "my dear mine" (26).

⁵⁴ "Sappho", *Rhapsodies* (London, 1901), p. 5. Further references will be included in the text.

These poems, of course - despite their consistency of tone and style - may simply be exercises in poetic projection, revealing nothing more about "Sappho" than that he or she enjoyed striking different literary poses. To assume otherwise - to assume as lesbian readers, for example, that *Rhapsodies* celebrates one woman's love for another - would be to subject "Sappho"'s poems to that critical misconstruction that has for so long dogged the writings of Sappho herself. What I want to draw attention to, rather, are those poems in *Rhapsodies* which work ultimately to frustrate the casual reading they initially invite. 'Love', for example, which begins "The gold lights swayed upon his hair,/ Dark shadows fell across his throat" (20), seems to offer us a straightforward account of the speaker's erotic contemplation of a *man*. With the very last line, however, our assumptions are upset; 'Love' is revealed to be not the motivation for the poem, but the poem's *object*: "Where shall be found a flower so sweet," it ends, "As Love asleep". Here the male Love - a feminised, perhaps infantilised, Eros or Cupid - is removed from the (hetero)sexual arena altogether.

With 'Love' as a precedent, a later poem, 'Desire', seems to demand a similar reading. It begins:

Through all my wandering youth by stream or sea,
 Between the slumberous valleys filled with heat,
 Upon the mountain ridge - upon the lee -
 I have not heard the music of his feet. (21)

Here, what seems to be being referred to is a romantic desire for a lost or unattainable male - in which case the speaker, whose youth seems to have been spent in some very non-feminine occupations, could be male too. Or else, as in the previous poem, the speaker might be talking about Desire itself - implying that he or she has sought desire, but never experienced it. Yet again, Desire - in female or male personification - might *be* the speaker here. What is on the surface a straightforward, rather banal, poem, foregrounding its own affiliation to a highly gendered romantic literary tradition, appears on closer inspection to be loosening the very semantic bonds with which gender and genre are made secure - a project, indeed, with which many of the more experimental modernist writers would soon find themselves preoccupied.

There are three poems in *Rhapsodies* which refer to Sappho. 'Phaon' focuses

mainly on the legend which locates as the source of the ferryman's irresistible charms a beautifying balm given to him by Aphrodite; it ends on an image of Sappho, singing alone to the Lesbian sky and sea. In 'Lesbia' the poet searches for a suitable encomium - a "madly passionate, lasting song" - with which to praise the queen of song herself; and in the four-page 'Sappho' s/he seems to find it. Again, I shall quote from this obscure poem at length:

Sweet sister Sappho, long since wrapt in slumber
 Upon the distant shores of Mytilene;
 What song of all my songs of simple number,
 What song of all the songs that e'er have been,
 Shall grace thee more - O Sappho, love's last queen?

For tho' two thousand years of joy and sorrow
 Have parted us, as Time with flying feet
 Parts yesterday with sleep from dawning morrow -
 Yet long divided streamlets singing sweet,
 Thro' singing woods will in the ocean meet!

For thou art more to me than some great singer
 Whose name shines clearly from the hazy past;
 Thou art for ever with me, and the bringer
 Of ever living flowers that will outlast
 The burning summers and the winter's blast.

All thro' the twilight do I hear thee singing,
 With voice tuned low to suit the amorous wind,
 While every note of thy sweet song goes winging
 With subtle pleasure thro' my drowsy mind,
 And in my dreams thou art not left behind.

.....

And yet I feel the soothing of thy fingers,
 Stray thro' my hair, as once across your lute
 The touch of love once felt for ever lingers!
 And Sapphic songs blow thro' th'Elysian flute -
 Aerial whispers when the winds are mute.

Thy lips are close to mine, I feel their passion,
 And drink deep draughts of love's perpetual fire,
 For there is love that lasts beyond love's fashion,
 Beyond the fleeting joy or fierce desire,
 Beyond the further points of light and higher:

Beyond imagination's deepest thinking,
 Where no man's dreams have ever gone before,
 Still lower than the plummet ever sinking,
 But never reaching the desired shore,
 Remoter than vast Nature's inmost core. (32-36)

The poem's long middle section, which I have left out, focuses upon Sappho in her Lesbian setting, dwelling upon her unreciprocated desire for Phaon, who loves her companion Rodophis. But as we can see, as far as the beginning and end of the poem are concerned, Sappho's problematical relationship with Phaon is eclipsed by her more harmonious partnership with the speaker: as in the Sapphic fantasies of Vivien and Hall, Sappho's potential seems to be fulfilled not in her own time and place, but when she is reconstructed in the present. Here, once again, is the sense of crossing the disparate centuries, of revivifying Sappho - to the extent, indeed, that in the last two stanzas I have quoted Sappho and her modern admirer seem to be meeting in a sensual, if not orgasmic, embrace. Reiteration - "Beyond... Beyond... higher..." - at first anticipates a sexual climax, then gestures towards its deferral: we might read in this the inevitable impossibility of attaining erotic satisfaction with the elusive Sappho; but it might also signify the endless transport into ever-greater sensual pleasure that constitutes the Sapphic orgasm. But is this also a *sapphic* sexual encounter? The imagery, which is expansive but also interior - "deepest", "sinking", "inmost core" - hints at a female sexual topography; as does the reiteration of the oceanic vocabulary, first introduced in the second stanza to symbolise the speaker's union with Sappho. There is penetration here, then - but a kind of *inter*-penetration, a diffuse sexual mingling, rather than the more familiar phallic invasion of male-authored sexual fantasy. This communion does take place, after all, where "no *man's* dreams have ever gone before".

I am, clearly, attempting to claim this poem as *implicitly* lesbian; but, once again, I would draw attention to "Sappho"'s sexual caginess - and to the fact that, even if a lesbian sexual encounter is hinted at here, that gives no indication of either the gender or the sexual orientation of the poem's author. "Sappho" *may* have been a female author exploiting Sappho's reputation as a writer of erotic verse to and about other women to produce her own lesbian love poems; s/he also may have been a male writer - like Louÿs or Aldington - attempting titillating sapphic lyrics. But, as long as Sappho retained her old status of *heterosexual* queen of love, s/he could never totally be identified as either.

Clearly, then, while outspoken feminists like Barney and Vivien were stripping away the heterosexual Sapphic narratives they considered to be obscuring the true sexual identity of their lesbian icon, writers such as "Sappho", Field and Hall were happy to take advantage of Sappho's iconographical ambiguity - and of the instabilities in lesbian

definition that ambiguity reflected. Sappho perhaps served their projects in the same way that, as Alan Sinfield argues, the 'dandy' figure served Wilde's: like the dandy, she had at this time "a secure cross-sex image, yet might anticipate, on occasion and in the main implicitly, an emergent same-sex identity".⁵⁵ As the twentieth-century progressed, and lesbian identities became both more solid and more public, scope for the production of equivocal Sapphic fictions dwindled - the Sappho of Stead's *The Salzburg Tales*, for example, like the novel's Antinoüs, is a notorious homosexual. As we shall see in chapter 6, by the 1930s some lesbian writers would be finding it politically expedient to press Sappho into the period's new sexual categories; by then, too, a range of historical icons would be challenging Sappho's dominance over lesbian representation.

⁵⁵ Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century* (London, 1994), p. 73.

CHAPTER 5

Women Astride: Historical Fiction and Lesbian Models

For the lesbian subcultures of Europe and America, the decades between the two world wars were eventful and defining ones. Like homosexual men in the 1870s, '80s and '90s, lesbians in this period experienced both a new public visibility and a corresponding public backlash: saw the appearance of a rash of lesbian novels - some celebratory, many cheerless; felt the threat of anti-lesbian legislation (proposed in the House of Commons, but rejected by the Lords, in 1921); and witnessed a number of sensational court cases, including the Maud Allen/Pemberton Billing affair of 1918, and, of course, the infamous censorship trial involving *The Well of Loneliness* (1928). The latter event, in particular, cast a limelight on lesbianism not only for a public who might have preferred to keep it in the dark, but for scores of grateful women.¹

The period saw, too, the emergence of a distinct, organised lesbian historiography, a quest for lesbian precedent played out not, as it had been in Vivien's day, in the poetry and tableaux of the literary salon, but in the more mainstream arenas of fiction and biography. The lesbian models identified by this quest similarly surpassed the merely Sapphic: Sappho's authority over lesbian culture remained strong, but was contested by a new gallery of historical icons. The Amazons, Queen Christina of Sweden, the Ladies of Llangollen - figures we have come to think of as the *grandes dames* of lesbian history - all were recovered for the first time for an explicitly lesbian feminist agenda in the 1930s.

¹ Michael Baker, *Our Three Selves: A Life of Radclyffe Hall* (London, 1985), p. 226. Baker gives a comprehensive account of the *Well* trial; for details of the Allen/Pemberton Billing case, see Regenia Gagnier's *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Aldershot, 1987), especially Appendix A.

The names of the novelists and biographers who claimed them - Maude Meagher, Margaret Goldsmith, Mary Gordon - are, tellingly, rather more obscure. These were women whose primary emotional and political (and, in at least one verifiable instance, erotic) commitments were to other women, and they enjoyed their own supportive networks of female friends and fellow-writers. But these networks did not, as far as we know, intersect: homosexual historiography was never for early lesbians the kind of subcultural *movement* it was for Hellenists and Boy-Lovers, and, perhaps partly for that reason, the authors of this key moment in the history of lesbian retrospection have slipped into obscurity.

Though produced independently of one another, however, their novels and biographies are nevertheless intimately and suggestively related. Just as, collectively, the Antinous fictions of the decades flanking the turn of the century betray the contours of the period's own particular homosexual landscape, so the shape of the lesbian retrospection of the 1930s hints at a distinct underlying topography of knowledge, experience and myth: its authors return again and again, in emulation or critique, to particular, very modern, lesbian narratives. These narratives are both cultural - sexological, for example - and literal: the texts we shall be looking at in this chapter and the next followed quite consciously in the wake of the influential and sometimes scandalous lesbian fictions - Woolf's *Orlando*, Compton Mackenzie's *Extraordinary Women*, Hall's *The Well* - that were published in 1928. For most of the historiography discussed here, whether fictional or non-fictional, these novels constitute lesbian ur-texts that are at least as compelling as historical reality or myth - and sometimes more so.

Indeed, for many writers of the period narratives of sexual and gender transgression in general, and of lesbianism in particular, were clearly best told with - and perhaps even untellable without - invocation of a small but versatile fund of tropes, icons and plots. This was sometimes passing - the Marie Antoinette 'obsession', for example, which, as Terry Castle has noted, insinuates itself with uncanny regularity into early twentieth-century lesbian representation² - sometimes more elaborate; sometimes, indeed, it involved replication of an entire, particularly suggestive, literary model. Such, at least, is the case with Nora Purtscher-Wydenbruck's *Woman Astride*, a fictionalised historical

² Terry Castle, 'Marie Antoinette Obsession', *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York, 1993), pp. 107-49.

biography of 1934, and a text I want briefly to examine before turning to the more blatant lesbian fictions of Meagher, Goldsmith and Gordon.

Woman Astride

The life of the cross-dressing heroine of *Woman Astride* is scarcely more remarkable than that of its author. Countess Nora Wydenbruck was born into an aristocratic Austrian household and related to many of the ruling families of Europe. Though she enjoyed the privileges of her class, she bitterly resented the limitations imposed upon her as a daughter and a woman: she describes in her autobiography, for example, how she was "deeply disappointed" when her first baby was born a girl, "for I had longed to have a boy who would be able to do all the things my sex had debarred me from doing - and the more I entered into the world of women, the more I disliked it".³ In 1919 she married the celebrated animal portraitist Alfons Purtscher; in the aftermath of the First World War and the Austrian revolution, however, she lost, in her own words, "security, tradition and fatherland".⁴ Their fortunes ruined in the Austrian economic crisis, she and her husband sought a new life in England; here they lived in a series of London boarding-houses and bedsits until his paintings began, once more, to sell. Wydenbruck herself subsequently gained considerable recognition as an artist and writer; her diverse literary output included fiction, translations, a study of the paranormal (with which she had some startling and persuasive encounters), and two autobiographies.

Woman Astride is based upon the life of Judith von Loë, Wydenbruck's seventeenth-century ancestor. An appendix to the novel offers the bare facts of Judith's adventures - as relayed to Wydenbruck, apparently, by a Westphalian burgomaster in the 1920s - which began when she

disappeared from her home with a Swedish Colonel on the night when he killed her father in a duel. Nothing was heard of her until she reappeared fifteen years later, shortly after the conclusion to the Thirty Years War, took possession of Loë Castle, [...] was besieged and finally allowed to depart with full honours of war. Later it was learnt that she had

³ Nora Wydenbruck, *My Two Worlds: An Autobiography* (London, 1956), p. 137.

⁴ Wydenbruck, *My Two Worlds*, p. x.

fought in the Swedish army, attained the rank of captain for her bravery, wounded her lover in a duel and disappeared when he wrote from Sweden, divulging the secret of her sex. After many years it became known that in the Eifel Forest, a hermit had died in the odour of sanctity; his corpse was discovered to be that of a woman, wearing a hair-locket with the arms of Loë.

"This is the framework of facts round which I have built my story", Wydenbruck continues. "May the spirit of my great-aunt Judith forgive me if I have unwittingly misrepresented her!"⁵

Fidelity of representation, however, was scarcely the main aim of a novel as imaginative and allusive as *Woman Astride*. Wydenbruck's Judith is - like the young Wydenbruck herself - headstrong and tomboyish, frustrated by the conventions of the Catholic, patriarchal German aristocracy: "She ought to have been a boy, her mother thought, and she wondered whether she had done wrong in praying so fervently for a son and heir" (14). In the Swedish Colonel Larsson who requisitions her family home she finds not just a lover, but a passport to adventure: she disguises herself as a man and travels into war at his side, enlisting in the Protestant Swedish army as Gent von Oyen, renouncing her sex, her faith and her homeland in one move. As a soldier she proves to be courageous and well-liked - too much so, indeed, for the jealous Larsson. Fired by his unconcealed resentment, Judith challenges him to a duel; when he loses, he informs their General of her true identity.

From this point onwards, until the moment when Judith is discovered, dead, in her hermit's cottage, Wydenbruck's tale is pure fiction. Crucially - and quite contrary to the implications of the Westphalian sources - Judith's General does not believe Larsson's charge. Finding her "'a good-looking, soft-spoken young fellow'" (115), he sends her on a diplomatic mission to Constantinople.

Judith's sojourn in the "enchanted world" of Constantinople (131) proves to be a dramatic one. Lured into the house of a rich pasha by a bored Turkish wife who has been misled by her masculine disguise, Judith is surprised in the woman's apartments by the pasha himself. To save herself and the adulterous wife, Judith tears open her shirt, revealing her breasts and her true sex; she is spared the sword but, much to her dismay,

⁵ Nora Purtscher-Wydenbruck, *Woman Astride* (London, 1934), pp. 319-20. Further references will be included in the text.

is installed in the pasha's harem. "The horrible irony of this anticlimax filled her with loathing and despair - the knowledge that she who had thought to have thrown off the fetters of her sex should now be forced to take on the part of a female in its most primitive and degraded sense" (139). Worse, however, is to follow: the harem's inhabitants decide it is time that the new, "thin slave" is "apprenticed in the fine arts of love".

Suddenly Judith found herself subjected to experiences she had never dreamt of. One night she was fetched from her bed, swiftly overpowered and bound - and then lay writhing helplessly under the wanton caresses of lascivious slave girls [...].

Day after day, night after night, she had to endure the ever-changing ordeal [...]. Perfumes and spices, languorous music, voluptuous dances and mysterious drugs were made to inflame her blood while she was ceaselessly subjected to the apprenticeship of the senses. (145-6)

"Almost she might have lost herself" - except that she finds in the "unbearable physical ecstasy" (146) attained (despite her resistance) at the hands of the skilful slave girls, the vision of a beautiful dream city, which offers her a kind of refuge, and to which she returns, at mystical moments, at various points throughout the novel.

Judith's desire to escape from the harem now becomes more urgent. Learning that the elusive pasha is more interested in boys than in his wives, she hardens her slender body with exercise, and dances provocatively before him at a formal banquet. Once invited to his chamber, however, she forestalls his amorous advances, Scheherazade-like, by telling him a story - the story of her adventures as a runaway and soldier. They end up chatting "like two old campaigners" (160), and the pasha, entertained, grants her her freedom. "'Yes,'" he tells her, "'I suppose you are born that way - with a man's soul in a woman's body'" (161). Judith disguises herself as a man once again, and enlists in the Turkish army; when she is captured by Germans, however, she reveals her true nationality, and is drawn into a scheme to advance the liberation of the German allies, the Hungarians. She stains her skin and joins a band of travelling gipsies, who adopt her as a blood-brother; with them she roams Hungary, stirring the peasants into revolt.

Judith's adventures in the second half of the novel remain diverse, but grow increasingly mystical. In England she teams up with a cavalier, Anthony, and the two become soldiers of fortune. Judith falls in love with him, but dreads threatening their friendship by abandoning her disguise. She takes him to her empty family home - the

castle to which, as an unmarried daughter, she has no claim - and visits him, in woman's clothes, silently and at night; he believes her to be the ghost of her mythical twin sister, and makes love to her. When Anthony marries, and emigrates to the New World, Judith is heartbroken, but finds her vocation as apprentice to an "adept" in Amsterdam. In his house, time seems to stand still: the forty days she spends with him are the equivalent of twelve years in the outside world. Judith discovers she can cure the sick; she installs herself in a hermitage on the edges of a village, helping the local people, and meditating. One night she hears Anthony calling her, and is transported, out of her body, to his side. On his death-bed, he embraces her, and "for one exquisite moment, she was face to face with his real self and she knew that he understood at last...." (316). Soon, Judith herself dies. She enters, finally, the beautiful city of her dreams, and all her dead friends - Anthony among them - welcome her. "What she then experienced", claims the text, "can no longer be described in words" (318). Her body, still in its male disguise, is discovered by the shocked Westphalian villagers.

Wydenbruck's reconstruction of her ancestress' life is, as she herself acknowledges, a fantastic blend of history and speculation; despite its supernatural elements, it ends with a bibliography, and quotes, intermittently, from a range of authentic sources. But the text is also a curious amalgam of various other models. Haunting Judith's story are the biographies of at least two real-life cross-dressers: Christina of Sweden - subject, as we shall see in chapter 6, of a rash of new studies in the '20s and '30s - who similarly renounced her homeland and her faith to journey, uncertainly, around Europe (and whose career was, indeed, almost exactly contemporary with Judith's); and Flora Sandes, famous for her exploits as an officer in the Serbian army during the First World War. Sandes, too, chafed under the fetters of upper-class femininity: "When a very small child", she writes in her *Autobiography of a Woman Soldier* (1927), "I used to pray every night that I might wake up in the morning and find myself a boy [...]. Many years afterwards [...] I [...] realized that if you have the misfortune to be born a woman it is better to make the best of a bad job, and not try to be a bad imitation of a man".⁶ She, too, adopted female dress to impersonate a comrade's 'sister', and visited a Turkish harem: "a bare room", she writes, "containing

⁶ Flora Sandes, *The Autobiography of a Woman Soldier: A Brief Record of Adventure With the Serbian Army, 1916-1919* (London, 1927), p. 9. Further references will be included in the text.

half a dozen women, most of them hideous, old hags, and one very pretty girl whom I supposed to be the latest wife. They all screeched and covered their faces when I came in, and it was a long time before I could persuade them that I was a woman" (157-8). Such scenes, to be sure, are staples of female disguise plots, and women soldiers of all varieties - from Joan of Arc, who was canonised in 1920, to 'Colonel' Barker, who was brought to trial in 1929 for impersonating a man and marrying another woman - were enjoying a new vogue in the '20s and '30s.⁷ All of their stories, perhaps, feed into *Woman Astride*, securing Wydenbruck's "great-aunt" a place in a tradition of gender protest at once topical and prestigious.

But it is, of course, to another fictionalised hero/heroine that Judith von Loë bears the most striking resemblance: Virginia Woolf's Orlando. Like *Woman Astride*, *Orlando* transgresses the conventions of both gender and genre: its transvestite, transexual main character is at once the picaresque heroine of a fantastic historical epic, and the subject of a (mock) biography - *Orlando* has an index if not, like *Woman Astride*, a bibliography, and its narrative is similarly interspersed with quotations from real and imaginary historical documents. Like Judith, Orlando was based, famously, on an actual woman - Woolf's friend and lover, Vita Sackville-West. The histories Woolf and Wydenbruck seek to tell are - amongst others - the combined family and national histories of their aristocratic subjects. Both novels are novels of consolation; each recovers a prestigious personal mythology for its dispossessed heroine (both Judith and Sackville-West lost their family homes to a male relative) and - in Wydenbruck's case - for its expropriated author: "Judith was the only member of my family", she claimed, "I would have liked to imitate".⁸

At the heart of these mythologies are fantasies of gender transgression. The most significant echoing of Woolf's novel by Wydenbruck's occurs when Judith visits, and is quite literally unmanned by, the city of Constantinople. Occupying a suggestive position at the border between East and West, Constantinople has long figured in European fantasy as the site of ambiguity and transgression: a place where sexes, cultures and races

⁷ See Julie Wheelwright, *Amazons and Military Maids: Women Who Dressed as Men in the Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness* (London, 1989), for more on these figures, and a discussion of the female warrior phenomenon in general.

⁸ Wydenbruck, *My Two Worlds*, p. 2.

provocatively intermingle, and risk losing or exchanging their defining features. In letters and memoirs from the seventeenth century to the twentieth, English travellers have noted the vagaries of Turkish eros, and the peculiarities of Turkish dress (through which males and females alike seemed to be attired in trousers and waiscoats). One such traveller was Lady Mary Wortly Montagu, whose husband, Edward, occupied the position of British Ambassador to Constantinople enjoyed by Orlando;⁹ another was the eccentric Lady Hester Stanhope, who "emerged in Syria," according to an article written by Woolf herself in 1910, "astride her horse, and in the trousers of a Turkish gentleman".¹⁰

Like Orlando, Wydenbruck's Judith is, as we've seen, sent on a diplomatic mission to Constantinople; and it is there that she, too, makes the dramatic transition from 'male' to female. That the site of her metamorphosis is a harem is entirely appropriate: amongst Western myths of Islam and the Orient the seraglio has enjoyed a privileged position as a place of polygamous pleasure and lesbian intrigue; the harem in which Judith finds herself forcibly installed is home to a variety of deviants, including eunuchs, lesbians, and drug-addicts.¹¹ Here - again after the manner of Orlando, who, as a man in Constantinople, is "the adored of many women and some men"¹² - Judith has an ambisexual appeal: as she dances before the pasha, "the women watched her flushing and paling, and the very eunuchs drew in their breath with a hissing sound" (157). Like Woolf's heroine, she leaves Constantinople and joins a band of wandering gipsies; and though her adventures are confined to the seventeenth century and fill only one, rather long, lifetime, she does, like Orlando, achieve a degree of timelessness as apprentice to the mysterious adept - and she is certainly liberated from the laws of history when she is assumed into the heavenly city at her death.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, when retelling her ancestress' story,

⁹ Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York and London, 1992), p. 312.

¹⁰ Virginia Woolf, 'Lady Hester Stanhope', in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Volume 1: 1904-1912* (London, 1986), p. 327. For more on the particular resonance of Constantinople in the lives and writing of both Woolf and Sackville-West, see David Roessel, 'The Significance of Constantinople in *Orlando*', in *Papers on Language and Literature*, 28 (4) (Fall 1992), pp. 398-416.

¹¹ For more on the seraglio, see Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient* (London, 1988); for more on the supposed prevalence of lesbianism in the harems of Islam in general and Constantinople in particular, see Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801* (London, 1993), pp. 255-6.

¹² Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (London, 1977), p. 78.

Wydenbruck clearly found in *Orlando* - a novel which does its own share of literary revisiting¹³ - a master-narrative of some weight. Like Woolf, she is sensitive to the inadequacies of, and instabilities within, *categories*. These categories are national and religious, as well as sexual; in Judith's biography, as in Orlando's, "everything is out of place"¹⁴: she is at various times a woman disguised as a man, a Catholic impersonating a Protestant, a German masquerading as a Swede, a Turk, and a gipsy. "'Don't you think, my Lord,'" she asks the Pasha, "'that there will come a time when men and women are not so different - I mean when they are human beings first of all?'" (165). Such a time comes not, of course, in her life, but on her death, when she enters the ethereal plane in which individuals commune not as men and women but as genderless, nationless essences. Significantly, as we've seen, the text cannot follow her there; what the novel really testifies to is the *immutability* of sexual difference in patriarchal culture. Judith appears, to two observers at least, to be a man trapped in a woman's form; but her tragedy is that, for most of the narrative, she is a woman trapped in a man's, unable to enjoy equality with men in any other guise, and unable to achieve intimacy with her male beloved other than as his comrade, or - doubly removed - as the ghost of her own mythical twin sister. Judith and Anthony's thwarted passion is a far cry from Orlando and Shelmerdine's flexible union; we could say of Judith what Esther Newton has said of Hall's Stephen Gordon - that "[u]nlike Orlando, [she] is trapped in history; she cannot declare gender an irrelevant game".¹⁵ Revisiting Woolf's fantasy, Wydenbruck may also, of course, be critiquing it.

It is precisely the historical novel's capacity for *interference* with literary and cultural models that I am interested in exploring here. To return *Woman Astride* to its particular cultural context - to read it, especially, in conjunction with Woolf's *Orlando* - is to

¹³ Susan M. Squier, for example, sees *Orlando* as recalling and re-reading Defoe's *Moll Flanders*. Interestingly enough, many of the points of intersection between Woolf's and Defoe's texts - "both novels have protagonists who disguise themselves as men; who consort with prostitutes and gipsies; who are experienced and capable international travellers" - are also those between *Orlando* and *Woman Astride*. See her 'Tradition and Revision in Woolf's *Orlando*: Defoe and "The Jessamy Brides"', in Rachel Bowlby (ed.), *Virginia Woolf* (London and New York, 1992), pp. 121-31, p. 123.

¹⁴ Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 195.

¹⁵ Esther Newton, 'The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman', in Estelle B. Freedman, Barbara C. Gelpi, Susan L. Johnson and Kathleen M. Weston (eds.), *The Lesbian Issue: Essays from SIGNS* (Chicago and London, 1985), pp. 7-25, p. 20.

observe the considerable intertextual freight with which even the slightest of historical fictions might be loaded - and thus to begin to get a sense of the attractions of the genre for the covert political commentator. As I suggested in my Introduction, lesbians - Bryher, Mary Renault, Sylvia Townsend Warner - have been prominent among the many women writers adept at exploiting the genre's escapist or politically innocent reputation for their own, sometimes subversive, purposes; it is, indeed, one of Warner's historical novels - the 1936 *Summer Will Show* - that Terry Castle has identified as an "exemplary 'lesbian fiction'".¹⁶ Though considerably better known than any of the texts examined in this chapter and the next, *Summer Will Show* is, like them, a non-canonical but highly allusive work, standing, as Castle points out, in revisionary relation to various key male texts - notably texts, like Flaubert's *L'Education sentimentale*, in which a Sedgwickian triangle of homosocial bonding is classically deployed. Set in the revolutionary Paris of 1848, the novel explores the relationship between an English aristocrat, Sophia Willoughby, and Minna Lemuel, her husband's Jewish mistress. Having travelled to France to confront her husband, Frederick, Sophia finds herself instead drawn under the spell of the charismatic Minna. The two women unite in a model of *female* bonding in which Frederick is the facilitating but redundant third term; ultimately, as the women establish an unconventional *ménage*, he is elided altogether. It is this "subverted triangulation, or erotic 'counterplotting'", claims Castle, that characterises lesbian fiction in general (134).

Castle's recuperation of *Summer Will Show* for lesbian literary history is impressive, and important. But to posit Warner's novel as "exemplary" is, inevitably, to isolate it, to present it as a landmark lesbian fiction on an otherwise featureless literary landscape; it is also to place it in a new canon of classic lesbian texts, each removed from its immediate context, and disaffiliated from generic conventions (tellingly, Castle dismisses what she sees as the "superficial historicism" of Warner's novel by stressing its ultimate tendency towards fantasy [145]). As I have suggested - and as I intend amply to have illustrated by the close of the next chapter - the 1930s was a time in which the long homosexual tradition of historical speculation found new expression, in the work of

¹⁶ Terry Castle, 'Sylvia Townsend Warner and the counterplot of lesbian fiction', in Joseph Bristow (ed.), *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing* (London and New York, 1992), pp. 128-147, p. 134. Further references will be included in the text.

feminist writers intent on reclaiming or inventing a distinctly lesbian past. In this tradition, unacknowledged in Castle's essay, Warner's cautious, understated lesbian novel clearly has a place - but certainly not a privileged one. I want to devote the remainder of this chapter not to a reconsideration of *Summer Will Show* - which has been amply and admirably addressed by Castle and by other critics¹⁷ - but to a discussion of a hitherto forgotten novel: Maude Meagher's *The Green Scamander* (1933), which reworks, in some surprisingly modern ways, the Amazons of classical myth. Pre-dating *Summer Will Show* by three years, *The Green Scamander* is, like so much lesbian literature, non-canonical to the point of obscurity. But it, too, constructs a lesbian romance in the interstices of historical narrative; and, as we shall see, in its refiguring of patriarchal geometries, Meagher's novel is even more daring than Warner's.

The Green Scamander

Originally born in Boston, Maude Meagher pursued a varied expatriate career as an actress, dancer, journalist and novelist. She seems to have been based throughout the 1920s in London, but travelled extensively - wintering in Capri, for example, and visiting China in 1934 with her great friend, the celebrated Sinophile and translator Florence Ayscough (to whom she dedicated her first novel, *White Jade* [1930]). Such connections suggest a familiarity, at least, with lesbian culture: Ayscough was herself the life-long friend of lesbian poet Amy Lowell, while Capri, of course, was a homosexual resort of international repute - somewhat past its sapphic prime in the 1930s, but made recently famous by Compton Mackenzie's lampoon *Extraordinary Women*. *The Green Scamander* was Meagher's third novel, and her last. By the 1940s she was back in the US, and engaged in editing the pacifist journal *World Youth* with another friend, Carolyn Smiley. The two women transferred the journal from Boston to California, where they purchased two acres in the foothills of the Santa Cruz mountains; there, over a period of six years and more or less single-handedly, they built the adobe house that was to be their and their

¹⁷ For example, Janet Montefiore, in 'Listening to Minna: realism, feminism and the politics of reading', *Paragraph*, 14 (3) (November 1991), pp. 197-216.

journal's permanent home.¹⁸

The Green Scamander is divided into two sections. In the first, which is set in the Amazon capital of Themiscyra, we are made familiar with the Amazons' history and culture, and introduced to their co-queens, Penthesilia and Camilla. Originally a maverick band of warrior priestesses, the Amazons were inspired by their goddess, Kybelê, to establish an all-female settlement on the shores of the Black Sea. As the years have passed, the Amazons have developed a unique, autonomous culture, with a Council of Matrons and two queens - one military, the other administrative - at its head. The Amazon army, in particular, is legendary: a superbly effective body of women warriors that has become the scourge of neighbouring states, ruthlessly governed by the current soldier-queen, Penthesilia. It is she who decides to lead the Amazon warriors on their doomed mission of aid to King Priam, who has been at war with Greece since his son's elopement with Helen, the beautiful wife of the King of Sparta. The novel's second section, set in Troy, details the events leading up to Penthesilia's fateful encounter with Achilles, the Greek hero; more specifically, it examines the dynamics of the relationship between Penthesilia, Camilla, and Helen of Troy herself.

Meagher's was not the only imagination to be fired by ancient stories about the warrior women of Themiscyra. Female soldiers of all kinds had, as we've seen, attracted considerable popular attention in the post-war period; but the Amazons, in particular, inspired a rash of early twentieth-century texts, both imaginative and academic. Poets such as T. Sturge Moore and John Erskine re-worked the women warriors along with other classical heroes and established them, as we shall see later, in influential heterosexual poses. Historians debated seriously the location and nature of Amazon and other ancient female societies; works ranged from Guy Cadogan Rothery's overview *The Amazons in Antiquity and Modern Times* (1910), to Emanuel Kanter's *The Amazons: A Marxian Study* (1926) and Robert Briffault's multi-volume *The Mothers* (1927), which traces human culture back to powerful, suppressed matriarchal origins. Meagher situates

¹⁸ Information on Meagher comes from the *Saturday Review* (see especially the short biographical article, 2 January 1932), p. 434; from Meagher's and Smiley's *How We Built an Adobe House for World Youth* (Los Gatos, 1950); and from the dust jacket of *The Green Scamander* (Boston, 1933). I am grateful to Stephen Pekich, of Houghton Mifflin Company, for the latter reference. The British edition of *The Green Scamander*, published in London, appeared in 1934. I shall refer throughout to the Boston imprint; page numbers will be included in the text.

The Green Scamander quite deliberately in the midst of this debate ("Nothing in life excites her so much", claims the book's dust-jacket, "as following the ancient moon-goddess cults back behind 1000 B.C."), and the novel - which refers the reader, via footnotes and a bibliography, to both classical sources and modern histories - is consequently a curious and revealing pastiche of scholarship and fiction.

A full-scale alternative society - complete, as we've seen, with elaborate genealogy - Meagher's Themiscyra has a place moreover in a distinctly feminist tradition of utopian speculation reaching back to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915), 'Irene Clyde's' *Beatrice the Sixteenth* (1909), Mary Lane's *Mizora* (1890), and beyond.¹⁹ As in those texts - as, indeed, in many of the classic utopian texts - we are introduced to Amazon society through the eyes of a stranger, Marda. Abducted from Themiscyra as a girl by a Greek raiding party, Marda has spent her life in various adventures in different parts of Greece; she is returning to her homeland to die. As Anne Cranny-Francis has pointed out, the "absent referent" of the literary utopia is "the writer's and contemporary reader's own society".²⁰ Thus Marda's conversation with Celano, a young Amazon, forms an ironic critique of women's place in patriarchal culture which extends far beyond its classical context. The conversation occurs during a spectacular display of riding and marksmanship by the Amazon army; Celano is understandably "bewildered" when she learns that Greek parents prize their boy-children more highly than their daughters.

'But why? A daughter can bear children, as well as fight and work. Boys can only do the latter. As for engendering children, one man will do for several free women.'

'Women don't fight in Greece,' said Marda.

'Why not?'

'It's not allowed.'

'What do they do? Work?'

'The poor ones do, and the slaves. The rich ones direct their servants, manage their households - and of course they all bear children and spin and weave and so on.'

'That sounds reasonable. Is there good hunting in Greece?'

'Yes. But the women don't do it.'

'So they don't fight and they don't hunt. They must get very weak and flabby, sitting at home all day.'

'The men like them to be delicate. The men do the strenuous things like hunting and fighting and ruling.'

'All the really interesting things - except bringing up children. The men don't bear the children, I suppose?'

¹⁹ For a discussion of the Amazon theme in women's utopian writing see Nan Bowman Albinski's *Women's Utopias in British and American Fiction* (London, and New York, 1988).

²⁰ Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (London, 1990), p. 122.

'No, but they claim sole possession of them as soon as they are born.' (35-6)

And so on. Such conversations are standard utopian devices, but Celano's ignorance of the Greek patriarchy is significant. Though contemporaneous with the Homeric culture yearned after by homosexual writers like Symonds and Raile, Meagher's feminist utopia - like Vivien's Lesbos - is also crucially distanced from it. Amazonia is located at the far edge of the Hellenic fatherland, and constitutes something of a thorn in its side: Amazon warrior ranks are continually replenished by "the independent women of Lycia, Caria and other sea-fronting states" (25). But if Amazon society is a marginal one, its very autonomy and insularity make it dangerously prone to being marginalised, by the more aggressive Greek city states. In a series of authorial interventions, Meagher herself reminds us of the Amazons' fate: Penthesilia was of course the last great Amazon queen; Themiscyra represents the final flowering of a feminist Golden Age. *The Green Scamander* is overshadowed by historical inevitability, and its plot will ultimately converge with the grander narrative of anti-feminist history - though not, as we shall see, without protest, qualification, and subterfuge.

As well as introducing us to the manners and mores of Themiscyran society, Marda's questioning glances lead us to the city's two queens, prominent figures at the annual review of Amazon troops with which her homecoming coincides; Camilla is displaying her dazzling military prowess, but seems eager for the approval of Penthesilia - who, tight-lipped, arrogant even, watches from the sidelines. That Marda's (and our) speculation *about* the nature of their relationship accompanies her speculation *of* the warrior queen's body is not, I would suggest, accidental. Here is her impression of Penthesilia:

She sat easily, reins loose, towering above the other warriors, her knees in the Amazon fashion controlling the horse at will. Narrow-flanked, wide of shoulder, with powerful flexible hands, she had an enormous double-headed battle-axe stuck in her belt. (49)

Now I concede that, for the reading public of 1933, the fact that Penthesilia is sporting a giant labrys would not have had quite the same significance as it might for the modern

lesbian reader;²¹ but in Meagher's wide-shouldered, narrow-hipped, horse-riding heroine, created just a few years after Radclyffe Hall's sensational novel appeared in Britain and the US, there are surely other lesbian allusions being made. *The Green Scamander's* reviewers, at least, seem to have thought so: "there is a recurrent tinge of *Well of Loneliness* sentiment", wrote E. B. C. Jones for *The New Statesman and Nation*, "in [Meagher's] portrait of Queen Penthesilia, with 'her lean brown legs', her hatred of masculine love, her jealous affection for her young co-queen Camilla."²² Jones seems to be reading Penthesilia as a lesbian stereotype in the Stephen Gordon mould; indeed, the phrase "*Well of Loneliness* sentiment", which calls to mind the "men and women [or "unspeakables"] of the Oscar Wilde type" to whom commentators were prone euphemistically to refer in the early part of the century, reveals the extent to which Stephen, like Wilde before her, had come to figure as something of a homosexual paradigm or metonym.²³ But Meagher's invocation of the invert stereotype is, I would suggest, rather more complex than Jones', her revisiting of *The Well of Loneliness* neither undeliberate nor, indeed, uncritical.

If Penthesilia resembles Hall's inverted heroine, Camilla - gentle and devoted, and capable, as we learn later, of loving the men who inspire only sexual antipathy in her taciturn co-queen - resembles Stephen's lover, Mary Llewellyn. Together they form a version of the butch-femme dyad which has dogged popular representation of lesbianism throughout the century (and particularly, perhaps, since the publication of Hall's novel), but with which, nevertheless, many lesbian lovers have powerfully identified.²⁴ Penthesilia and Camilla's dyadic status is, however, crucially incomplete. For the first half of the novel is a drama of *thwarted* lesbian desire, as the two queens *almost* unite, *almost* acknowledge the mutual attraction that is such a palpable undercurrent of their

²¹ The appropriation/reinvention of Amazon iconography - which made the labrys earring or pendant *de rigueur* in some lesbian circles - was a vital feature of the expanding lesbian feminist culture of the 1970s. See, for example, Monique Wittig's and Sande Zeig's *Lesbian Peoples: Material for a Dictionary* (London, 1980).

²² E. B. C. Jones' review of *The Green Scamander*: *The New Statesman and Nation*, 21 April 1934, p. 604.

²³ Edith Ellis, in Volume 2 of her *Stories and Essays* (Berkeley Heights, 1924), refers to "the men and women of the Oscar Wilde type" (p. 55); "I'm an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort", confesses the miserable homosexual hero of Forster's *Maurice* (Harmondsworth, 1970) to his family doctor (p. 139).

²⁴ See Joan Nestle (ed.), *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader* (Boston, 1992). Hall herself is cited by Nestle as an early butch, Una Troubridge her passionate and courageous femme lover.

friendship, *almost* look each other in the eye... but not quite. Our sense of *Green Scamander*'s status as a lesbian text depends upon our willingness to acknowledge and trace within it what Jackie Stacey calls "the phenomenon of fascination between women".²⁵ Stacey examines two films, *All About Eve* and *Desperately Seeking Susan*, in an attempt to give an account of women's spectatorial pleasure; like many recent critics, she is anxious about the limiting of such space in Laura Mulvey's early, influential model.²⁶ Her own formulation, in which

the fascination of one woman with another, across the gap produced by their differences, structures the narrative development [...], contradicts the dominant convention within Hollywood cinema whereby the spectator is said to be inscribed within the look and desire of the male protagonist. What interests me about these films is the question of the pleasures for the female spectator, who is invited to look or gaze with one female character at another, in an interchange of feminine fascinations. (115)

Like the viewer of *All About Eve* and *Desperately Seeking Susan*, the reader of *The Green Scamander* is made a party to a similar "interchange" of same-sex "fascinations". As I have suggested, however, Meagher's project in this section of the novel is the *deferral* of satisfaction; the text is saturated with what Eve Sedgwick, discussing a rather different 'homosocial romance' (Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*), has termed "eye-hunger",²⁷ as Penthesilia and Camilla observe one other in sidelong glances, constituting each other as objects of erotic speculation, without achieving erotic *exchange*: "Her eyes lingered on Camilla's bent, gilded head" (51); "Camilla, glancing at the absorbed, dark face beside her, felt her heart shaken with pride" (55); "Penthesilia put her arm strongly about [Camilla's] shaking body and held her quiet. She turned her look, however, on Marda" (106); "Camilla, with a last imploring glance at the unnoting face of her friend [...]" (137). Most suggestive of all is the moment when the two women, after a trip through a secret underground passage, visit the Amazon Holy of Holies for a ritual touching of the resting-place of Kybelê's sacred stone. As in the writings of Sappho -

²⁵ Jackie Stacey, 'Desperately Seeking Difference', in Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment (eds.), *The Female Gaze: Women As Viewers of Popular Culture* (London, 1988), pp. 112-129, p. 114. Further references will be included in the text.

²⁶ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16 (3) (Autumn 1975), pp. 6-18. Many of the essays in Gamman and Marshment's collection attempt to revise Mulvey's formulation.

²⁷ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Across Gender, Across Sexuality: Willa Cather and Others', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 88 (1989), pp. 53-72, p. 69.

and, indeed, of the ancient Greeks in general, for whom "love was an effluence from the beloved person through the eyes into the lover's soul"²⁸ - the lesbian eros of *Green Scamander* is primarily specular - but here, cruelly blind:

As she laid her hands there, she thought she felt its essence thrilling upward through her body. The sensation was half pain, half ecstasy. She glanced from Penthesilia's steady hands beside hers to the Queen's face. That, too, was white with feeling, but Camilla's glance was not returned. (82)

The result of all these impassioned but thwarted glances is a high level of frustration - for the reader no less than for Camilla and Penthesilia. The effect of *The Green Scamander* is, remarkably, to coerce its reader - and, surely, not just its female reader - into a position from which textual fulfilment will only be secured by the erotic union of two women.²⁹ Until then, we are left in a state of anxiety similar to that of Camilla in a scene like this, where the wretchedly obtuse Penthesilia is leaving their cabin in the early morning:

The Queen stood a moment uneasily, fastening her belt and looking down at her friend. Camilla's face was turned away from her.

'Do you want me to hang my cloak over the window to shut out the light?'

'No, thank you,' said Camilla, with quivering lip.

She wanted to be taken in somebody's arms - in Penthesilia's arms - and petted to sleep. But she only heard the door close as the unsuspecting Queen went out. (114-5)

I need not labour the erotic overtones of the unfastened belt, the quivering lip; but we might note that the specifically sexual connotation of 'petting' was, according to the *OED*, well-established in the 1930s, particularly in an American context. Again and again the narrative of *The Green Scamander* pauses on this kind of loaded scene. Like Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* in Jane Marcus' persuasive formulation, Meagher's novel seduces its readers into complicity with a lesbian textual economy in which both the spaces between female bodies, and the gaps and ellipses between sentences and words, are

²⁸ John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (London, 1901), p. 29.

²⁹ Michèle Aina Barale, in 'When Jack Blinks: Si(gh)ting Gay Desire in Ann Bannon's *Beebo Brinker*', *Feminist Studies*, 18 (3) (Fall 1992), pp. 533-49, gives a stimulating account of the processes by which the reader of a gay text might be encouraged to adopt reading positions apparently inimical to his or her own gender and sexuality.

resonant and highly-charged.³⁰

If the first half of *Green Scamander* presents a visionary lesbian erotics in a state of suspension, then in the second half, in which Camilla and Penthesilia meet that fabled object of desire, Helen of Troy, the pleasures and the perils of sexual speculation are only intensified. Introduced to Helen at a welcoming banquet at Priam's palace, the Amazon queens respond in character: the taciturn Penthesilia "scarcely saw the golden beauty"; "Camilla, however, looked and looked and could not look enough. Helen was more beautiful than ever she had dreamed" (178). It is not long before a curious triangle of desire is established, a speculative orgy in which 'looks' seem as palpable as caresses, as intoxicating as wine:

Helen observed Camilla. She was like a bird, she thought, with wings only momentarily folded. Her eyes, that had a golden flutter in them like the wings of Hermes' feet, went everywhere. Seeing Helen's look on her she smiled with eager friendliness, and the Greek Queen felt as if something warm and quick had touched her cheek. (194)

'Camilla adores you,' said the Amazon without preliminary.

Helen's face did not relax.

'She has no reason to do that,' she said.

Penthesilia's eyes opened on the white and gold and sapphire before her, the deep enchantment that was Helen.

'Has she not?' she bantered. 'Beauty goes to her head as wine does rarely. She is drunk already with looking at you.' (195)

The Greek beauty saw to [Camilla's] comfort with the courtesy that in her was effortless perfection, then examined the younger woman's face more closely. [...] Camilla, for her part, looked at the Queen and found her perfect. She paid no compliments, but Helen had the sensation of being bathed in light. (196)

Penthesilia, "watching the two with lazy satisfaction through half-closed eyes" (196), tells Helen she is keeping Camilla off the battlefield the next day: "'She'll be about the Palace. You two might see something of each other'" (197). And on this, by now so suggestive, prospect, the chapter ends.³¹

³⁰ Jane Marcus, 'Sapphistory: the Woolf and the Well', in Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow (eds.), *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions* (New York, 1990), pp. 164-79.

³¹ Interestingly, the lesbian erotics of *Summer Will Show* similarly take place as it were in the optical field. Sophia is seduced by Minna, as Montefiore points out, when she listens to her spell-binding story in the crowded salon; but Sophia's pleasure is also *ocular*: "Never in her life had she felt such curiosity or dreamed it possible. As though she had never opened her eyes before she stared at the averted head, the large eloquent hands, the thick, milk-coffee coloured throat that housed the siren voice. Her curiosity went

However, Helen's appraising glances are destined to be directed elsewhere. From her vantage point high above the battlefield - the Tower of Ilium from which, in Homeric tradition, the patriarch Priam surveys the progress of his warring sons below - it is Penthesilia herself whom Helen observes, and with increasing interest. The Tower provides the setting for some of the novel's key scenes: scenes, as we shall see, of revelation; scenes, as here, of seduction. Helen and Penthesilia are discussing Amazonia.

'Haven't you women like me in your country?'

Penthesilia looked at her quickly, appraisingly, and shook her head in mock despair.

The other found herself blushing like a little girl. She withdrew her eyes from Penthesilia's frankly flattering ones with an effort.

'I mean,' - she stammered - 'women who really cannot live without men. For I can't, you know.'

Penthesilia nodded.

'I suppose not. It's your destiny. Yes, we've a few who can't, in spite of all the other interests there are in life. Sooner or later they leave us.'

'Do you utterly despise me for it?' murmured Helen, looking at the toe of her sandal.

'No! By Ishtar and Merodach!' swore Penthesilia, seating herself behind the Greek Queen. 'I think you are the most perfect product of a ridiculous point of view I've ever seen!'

Helen turned a whimsical face, half laughter, half protest.

'You put it queerly.'

The other looked at her without stirring.

'And what a lovely mouth you've got!' she added breathlessly. (203-4)

There is indeed something rather 'queer' about the way Penthesilia puts it; the result of all this frank appraisal is to give Helen - at whom women usually glance only in jealousy or awe - a new sense of herself as both object and subject of desire:

beyond speculation, a thing not of the brain but in the blood. It burned in her like a furnace, with a steadfast compulsive heat that must presently catch Minna in its draught, hale her in, and devour her" (*Summer Will Show* [London, 1987], p. 145). Minna seduces Sophia, in fact, with her gaze: while she speaks, her glance 'touches' her (127); later, Sophia must be 'released', into "giddiness" from it (135). Sophia, in the passage quoted above, sounds remarkably like the euphoric narrator of Sappho's Fragment 31, who jealously watches her beloved in conversation with a man; significantly, meeting Minna's glance gives her "no time to look for Frederick" (127): she tries to leave the apartment before he has the chance of "meeting her eye" (138). Once she has spent the night on Minna's sofa, and Minna has "gazed at her with a possessive earnest glance, a glance that" - like Meagher's Helen's - "instantly recalled the taste of the mulled wine offered overnight" (154), the novel's redefinition of optical erotics is complete: "I cannot understand, thought Sophia, what Frederick could see in you. But *I* can see a great deal" (154). We are used to finding equivalences with the phenomenon of 'cruising' in, and even in our approach to, older gay men's writing (think of Bartlett's *Who Was That Man?*); more work needs to be done, I think, on the lesbian codings of women's literary 'looks'.

Helen watched [Penthesilia's] lean, muscular walk until she was out of sight, and went back to her rooms in the Palace. There in a bronze mirror, the gift of Paris, she gazed intently at her own reflection, the smooth gold hair, calm brow, and deep eyes. (215)

She lets herself be washed and dressed by her attendants, Mela and Phoebe, for the dinner at which she will sit between Camilla and Penthesilia. Her feet are perfumed and hennaed, her nails are polished, her hair is curled. "‘Bring me my necklaces, Mela’", she commands; "‘I mean to dazzle every eye in the hall tonight!’" (217).

I shall discuss the implications of Penthesilia's presumptuous wooing of a character Gilbert and Gubar have labelled "the archetypal seductive female", later;³² what I want to draw attention to here is the way in which the Amazon's insinuating assault on Helen's identity as a woman who 'really cannot live without a man' is accompanied by an interrogation of the role constructed for women who *do* live - and love - "without men" in patriarchal ideology. This role is sharply defined in the opening scene of the novel's second section, set in Helen's chamber before the arrival of the Amazons in Troy. Phoebe, her maid, tells Helen about the supposedly monstrous habits of the warrior women. "‘From all I hear they're queer fowl, neither man nor beast’" (162): they burn their breasts off, she informs Helen, they eat their babies, or feed them on "‘snakes chopped up in mare's milk’" (164). Here Meagher herself intervenes; in a footnote to the maid's comments she points out that "The fantasies here related by Phoebe are not the author's inventions. They are all contained in Greek and Byzantine writings speculating on the Amazons' way of life" (160). We are reminded that the 'speculation' to which insubordinate women have traditionally been subjected has, indeed, often been hostile:

‘And worse things are told of these Amazons, my lady [...] Dark, unnatural things...’
The woman lowered her voice. ‘You know, my lady, they have no men in their country...’ (166)

Helen cuts short Phoebe's gossip and discounts it; later, however, in another intimate moment with Penthesilia on the Tower of Ilium, the Amazon catches Helen stealing a curious glance at her tunic.

³² Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century, Volume Two: Sexchanges* (New Haven and London, 1989), p. 363.

Penthesilia threw back her head and roared with laughter, all her strong white teeth flashing in the sun. The pink flush stole upwards to Helen's veil.

'A-mazos - without breasts,' chuckled Penthesilia. 'However did you think my women nursed their babies?'

With a quick gesture she pulled open the front of her tunic to the waist.

'Any more ideas? Think we have fish scales on our thighs?'

'Oh, no!' disclaimed Helen hastily. (212)

The two women go on to discuss the origin of such myths.

'The A-mazos theory is very generally believed,' said Helen.

'People will believe anything,' said the Amazon indifferently. 'Look at the example of ingenious credulity you've just given. The Greek meaning of a non-Greek word is taken to indicate our appearance.'

'People hate mysteries. They try to explain them.'

'When the mystery has even remotely to do with sex, the explanations are pretty generally unpleasant,' said Penthesilia.

'There seems to be a morass in people's minds that sends up an evil odour if one so much as stirs it with a finger.'

Penthesilia shrugged.

'The only way to clean things up is to be quite open. A few shocks and the air is cleared.'

'But mystery underlies mystery no matter how far down you go,' objected Helen.

'And people won't let you be open. They prefer to keep their morasses undisturbed.'

'I don't think they do. They only like to do their own secret poking.' (213-4)

Meagher's historical fantasy has veered into a discussion of deviance, definition and censorship. The body in question here is clearly not, or not just, that of the Amazon; we are reminded of the *lesbian* body's status as contested terrain in a variety of modern debates, including the medical, the legal and the moral. When Penthesilia calls for candour on sexual matters she is reiterating Radclyffe Hall's project of providing information on sexual inversion for the "general public";³³ significantly, her attack, in this post-*Well* text, on the "people [who] won't let you be open" involves redirecting the charge of corruption towards the commentators from whom, traditionally, it emanates: the censors themselves, here evocatively imagined engaged in "their own secret poking". If *The Green Scamander* re-views *The Well of Loneliness*, it does so with an implicit protest at that novel's suppression.

³³ Hall "had long wanted to write a book on sexual inversion," according to Una Troubridge's account of the genesis of *The Well*, "a novel that would be accessible to the general public who did not have access to technical treatises". Una, Lady Troubridge, *The Life and Death of Radclyffe Hall* (London, 1961), p. 81.

But, just as Wydenbruck in *Woman Astride* exposes the limits of her literary model even as she invokes it, so Meagher also revises *The Well* that she revisits: specifically, as we shall now see, she replaces that novel's tragic conclusion(s) with her own, utopian, lesbian denouement.

Wounded in a skirmish with the Greeks, Penthesilia is kept off the battlefield and under Helen's supervision. Camilla, an equally brilliant warrior, takes command of the Amazon troops. While Penthesilia and Helen dally on the Tower of Ilium, there is a lull in the battle below; Camilla playfully encourages the attentions of a young Trojan prince, Doryklos: "'You have the most entrancing dimples,'" he tells her (255). As they flirt, however, she is roused by the sounds of women's screams: a party of Greeks have raided a village, and are driving the spoils of their victory - women destined for the brothels and slave-camps of Hellas - across the plain. Camilla's burgeoning desire for Doryklos is cut short when he refuses to help her rescue the captive women. "'There's nothing,'" he laughs, "'as noisy as a woman once she starts being troublesome'" (259). Camilla hits him across the face and leads her Amazon squadron to the rescue. Greek soldiers, however, rush to the raiders' assistance, and the horsewomen are horribly outnumbered. Watching in anguish from the Tower, Penthesilia sees the Amazons cut down one by one; finally, Camilla herself is killed. Disregarding her unhealed wounds, and with only a shield and her double-headed axe for protection, Penthesilia hacks her way across the battlefield to rescue Camilla's body.

Unable to part with her beloved even after her death, Penthesilia keeps vigil beside the embalmed body for three nights; eventually she is visited by the ghost of Camilla herself, pleading for release into Hades. At this, the Amazon resolves to find her own death on the battlefield. She dons her armour, and fights with preternatural strength and skill all day; eventually she confronts the mighty Achilles. After hours of struggle, he delivers a fatal spear-thrust to her throat. When he removes Penthesilia's helmet, however, Achilles is struck with sorrow:

A woman! A sob rose in his great chest, for Achilles was ever prone to tears, and he leaned closer to scan the face in which there yet seemed a little life. Serenely Penthesilia looked up at him, then turned aside indifferently.

'The Queen of the Amazons!' said Achilles in awe.

On the mouth before him had appeared a smile, deprecating, pleading, eager. The eyes were on the empty air beyond the Greek's looming shoulder. (288-9)

Penthesilia's body is thrown into the green waters of the River Scamander; Achilles entreats the river god to give her "a clean burial at the edges of the sea" (290). Helen, on hearing the news, prepares Camilla's corpse for cremation. She chooses a precious headdress from her jewel-box to decorate the body, only to find that Penthesilia has already placed her own "necklace of violets carved from lapis-lazuli" around Camilla's throat (291). Camilla's body is burned, and Helen collects the ashes. By night, and in disguise, she makes her way to the banks of the Scamander.

There, with a whispered word of tenderness, she threw Camilla's ashes into the stream, and she thought, as she turned wearily to go back to Troy, that she heard a murmur in the darkness as two gallant souls went by into some farther dark, together. (291-2)

Many things are revised in the closing pages of Meagher's novel. Primarily, the text demands to be read alongside the various classical narratives it retells and rewrites - most notably, Homer's *Iliad*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and Quintus Smyrnaeus' fourth-century description of the fall of Troy. Located not, for the most part, upon the battlefield, but in the female quarters of Priam's palace, Meagher's account of the Trojan War both critically annotates these male-authored, male-centred originals, and appropriates their model of heroic friendship for *female* lovers. The scene in which Penthesilia is visited by Camilla's spirit, for example, is a direct allusion to Book 23 of the *Iliad*, in which Patroclus, beloved of Achilles, returns as a ghost to the Greek hero begging for burial and spiritual release. Crucially, Camilla herself does not appear with Penthesilia in any classical text; Meagher borrows her from the *Aeneid*, where she features as a brilliant Volscian warrior, favourite of the goddess Diana, who comes to Turnus' aid in his war with Aeneas. Inserting Camilla into Trojan history alongside Penthesilia, Meagher attempts to construct an alternative homoerotic paradigm: a heroic tradition in which women love and fight alongside one another - until death and, of course, beyond it. Reuniting its female warriors in the spirit world, *The Green Scamander* also implicitly revises the classical narratives in which, as Mandy Merck has shown, the Amazons figured as the always already-vanquished monsters against whom ancient Athens constructed its patriarchal self-image.³⁴ Penthesilia and Camilla's victory takes them

³⁴ Mandy Merck, 'The City's Achievements: The Patriotic Amazonamachy and Ancient Athens', in Susan Lipshitz (ed.), *Tearing the Veil* (London, Henley and Boston, 1978), pp. 95-115.

beyond historical narrative - not to the Greek afterlife which the homosexual heroes of Symonds' Hellenist verse had found so hospitable, but to something like the lesbian continuum in which Vivien located her feminist Sappho, and to which - as we shall see - women writers would continue to consign their lesbian icons.

Both the 'writing beyond the ending' and the dismantling and recombining of authoritative narratives has, as Rachel Blau DuPlessis argues, been an important strategy for twentieth century women writers in their attempts at "critical delegitimation";³⁵ the Trojan War alone has received resisting rereadings in the poetry of, amongst others, H.D. and Stevie Smith.³⁶ But, as Amy Richlin points out, the subversive appropriation of classical languages and texts by modern women writers has, itself, an ancient precedent: she compares authors such as Christina Stead to the women poets of the fourth century who favoured the form known as the *cento*, or patchwork, in which "old literary works were cut up and the bits reassembled to make a new poem".³⁷ We might place Meagher's re-writing of Greek and Roman narrative in this tradition: many centoists based their texts on those of Virgil and some, like her, re-worked the *Aeneid*.

If Meagher's novel tackles the classics, it also addresses a number of modern literary paradigms, including some of the key topoi of twentieth-century homosexual representation. The publishing pressures felt so keenly by Forster when he finished *Maurice* in 1914 had, after the *Well* trial of 1928, only intensified; his aims in his novel, as revealed in the afterword he added to the text in 1960, are pertinent to our understanding of Meagher's.

A happy ending was imperative. I shouldn't have bothered to write otherwise. I was determined that in fiction anyway two men should fall in love and remain in it for the ever and ever that fiction allows, and in this sense Maurice and Alec still roam the greenwood.

Had the novel ended unhappily, he wryly notes, "with a lad dangling from a noose or

³⁵ Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington, 1985), p. 120.

³⁶ See H.D., *Helen in Egypt* (1961) and Stevie Smith, 'I had a dream...', in *The Frog Prince and Other Poems* (1966).

³⁷ Amy Richlin, 'Striking Back at the (Roman) Empire: The Artist as Classicist in Stead and Others', in *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 11 (Fall 1992), pp. 265-87, p. 266.

with a suicide pact", it would almost certainly have been publishable.³⁸ Meagher's novel negotiates rather than challenges literary determinism: the double death upon which *The Green Scamander* ends certainly brings the novel into line with some of the gloomier representations of lesbian sexuality of the period (M. J. Farrell's *Devoted Ladies* [1934], for example, in which all narrative tensions are resolved when one of the lesbian characters drives the other over a cliff). But it was, nevertheless, no small achievement in 1933 for a lesbian romance as blatant as *Green Scamander* to end with that word - "that word which means so much to all friends" as Edward Stevenson had put it in his own happy romance *Philip and Gerald* (1891)³⁹ - which was to remain so conspicuously absent from the latter pages of homosexual novels well into the 1950s and '60s: "together". Like Forster's, Meagher's project was somewhat utopian. She dedicates her novel "τινὶ ἄγνωτῳ", 'To the Unknown' - a dedication which gestures simultaneously, perhaps, to the posthumous lesbian 'greenwood' to which Camilla and Penthesilia are ultimately consigned; to the uncertain reception which (especially in the aftermath of the *Well* trial) was the fate of the lesbian romance; and to the new tradition of affirmative homosexual representation which Meagher may have understood *The Green Scamander* to be inaugurating.

It is not only a lesbian genre which Meagher addresses; as I suggested earlier, by the 1930s the Amazons had been re-worked for a twentieth-century audience by a range of (predominantly male) poets. In their work - which tends to elaborate upon rather than to revise earlier sources - Achilles and Penthesilia's struggle is presented as a thwarted romance. The Greek hero's fatal spear-thrust is invariably imaged as sexual penetration - "His fingers on the weapon felt her death,/ Felt the woman quiver along the wood"⁴⁰ - through which, as in Laurence Binyon's *Penthesilia* (1905), the combatants are brought face to face in mutual desire, realising too late "the marvel of what might have been".⁴¹ *The Green Scamander*, on the other hand, as we have seen, understands Penthesilia's death as the moment of her (re)union with Camilla: "Serenely Penthesilia looked up at him, then turned aside indifferently. [...Her] eyes were on the empty air, beyond the

³⁸ E. M. Forster, 'Terminal note' to *Maurice* (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 218.

³⁹ Edward Irenæus Stevenson, *Philip and Gerald or Left to Themselves* (London, 1893; first published 1891), p. 318.

⁴⁰ John Erskine, 'Achilles and the Maiden', *Collected Poems, 1907-1922* (New York, 1922), p. 51.

⁴¹ Laurence Binyon, *Penthesilia* (London, 1905), p. 62.

Greek's looming shoulder". Evading the male gaze, Penthesilia meets Camilla's at last. Meagher's introduction of an extra, female term into this moment of frustrated heterosexual desire is a particularly audacious move - and, perhaps, a particularly lesbian one: to modern readers, the scene might recall those photo-montages in which Deborah Bright, inserting images of her "butch-girl" self into classic movie stills, disrupts their erotic dynamics by 'stealing the glances' of their heterosexual heroines (see figure 4).⁴² Like the male partners rendered superfluous by the trespassing Bright, and like Frederick in Warner's *Summer Will Show*, Achilles is here relegated to third place in a triangle of *female* bonding.

With its elaborate and multi-referential counterplotting, however, *The Green Scamander* goes one step further in its dismantling of "the 'canonical' triangular arrangement of male desire" than Castle's exemplary lesbian fiction.⁴³ Where Warner replaces the male-female-male triangle of classic homosocial fiction with a female-male-female configuration in which Frederick is excluded from the intimacy between his wife and mistress, Meagher constructs an erotic triangle - involving Camilla, Penthesilia and Helen of Troy - in which men do not figure at all. Helen, of course, is herself the third term of one of the most seminal homosocial texts in the Western canon, an object of exchange between Menelaus and Paris, between Greece and Troy. Inveigling this repository of patriarchal fantasy into the pages of a lesbian romance is surely one of the boldest of Meagher's revisionary tactics.

In the particular triangle which Meagher constructs, however - that of lesbian-heterosexual woman-lesbian - Helen is, ultimately, bound to lose out. As we have seen, she is temporarily reconstructed as an object - and perhaps subject - of lesbian desire; but for Meagher, if not for Warner, wives and mistresses are ultimately bound in complicity with the patriarchal system. Helen facilitates Camilla's and Penthesilia's reunion, but is excluded from it: the headdress - "a gift from Paris" (291) - she chooses for Camilla's body is rendered superfluous by the necklace of violets (love token, to those in the know,

⁴² Some of these montages - part of Deborah Bright's 'Dream Girls' series - are reproduced, with a commentary by Bright herself, in the aptly-named *Stolen Glances: Lesbians Take Photographs* (London, 1991), edited by Tessa Boffin and Jean Fraser, pp. 145-54.

⁴³ Castle, 'Sylvia Townsend Warner', p. 132.



Figure 4: Deborah Bright, untitled photo-montages from series *Dream Girls 1989-90*. © Deborah Bright (Pandora Press)

of particularly lesbian significance⁴⁴) placed there by Penthesilia. Instead, at the end of the novel she must turn "wearily" back to the world of homosocial bartering. As Penthesilia has earlier pointed out, it is Helen's "destiny" to be unable to live "without men" - a destiny which, unlike that of the Amazons, proves resistant to lesbian appropriation.

Woman Astride and *The Green Scamander* testify in similar ways both to the erotic imperatives of the period in which they were produced (fantasies of liberation, their lovers are nevertheless reunited only *extra-textually*), and to the strategies with which a visionary writer might attempt to negotiate and challenge those imperatives. For Wydenbruck, impatient with gender prescription in her life as well as her writing, *Orlando* was clearly a meaningful - if utopian - model. For writers of lesbian fiction, however, Woolf's androgynous heroine may have been no model at all; Meagher, at least, seems to have found the butch-femme dynamics of *The Well of Loneliness* a more appropriate framework around which to construct a lesbian romance. Her novel, with its commanding, mannish heroine, maintains the very particular lesbian biography of Hall's - a biography which, as Esther Newton has argued, was embraced by many early twentieth-century lesbians;⁴⁵ more importantly, it also protests against attempts to suppress that powerful biography. As we shall see in the following chapter, novelists were not the only commentators to employ historical narrative in the service of lesbian celebration and protest.

⁴⁴ Andrea Weiss discusses the status of violets as a specifically lesbian token in *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in the Cinema* (London, 1992), p. 2.

⁴⁵ Newton, 'The Mythic Mannish Lesbian'.

CHAPTER 6

‘The Friendship of the Happy Dead’: Lesbian Historical Biography

Like *The Green Scamander*, the texts I shall be looking at in this chapter - Margaret Goldsmith’s *Christina of Sweden* (1933) and *Sappho of Lesbos* (1938), and Mary Gordon’s *Chase of the Wild Goose* (1936), which retells the story of the ‘Ladies of Llangollen’ - demonstrate the extent to which historical figures and stories have not only been pressed into new, sometimes surprising, shapes under the weight of modern lesbian discourses and models, but pressed into the *service* of lesbian fantasy and apology. Where Meagher was interested in fashioning a lesbian genealogy from literature and myth, Goldsmith and Gordon attempt to locate the historical roots of modern lesbianism. For them, history has its own, previously suppressed or misunderstood, pertinence for the lesbian present, and must be reclaimed or conjured up in distinct, non-traditional - even supernatural - ways.

‘Unconventional but thoroughly fine’: *Christina of Sweden*

The remarkable life of Queen Christina of Sweden has intrigued and scandalised biographers and historians for three hundred years. Raised as a prince, Christina received a man’s education, and early on adopted masculine habits - riding, shooting and, increasingly as she grew older, wearing male attire. She was proclaimed King at eighteen (rather than Queen: in Sweden, a queen was merely the wife of a monarch, rather than a regent in her own right), and a range of royal suitors began formally requesting marriage. By her late twenties, however, she had still not married; unbeknown to her

already anxious political advisers, she was also harbouring a secret attraction to Catholicism. In 1654 she shocked Sweden by abdicating, and changing faiths. She made a home for herself in Italy, where she was introduced to a cardinal - Azzolino - to whom she was to remain fiercely, and apparently romantically, attached until the end of her life. She made periodic travels around the courts of Europe, where she was received with curiosity, though not always with courtesy. She involved herself in minor political intrigues, dabbled in alchemy, and wrote: a memoir of her early life, an unfinished study of Alexander the Great, and a book of maxims. She revelled in the company of learned men and clever women, and became, in her later days, a generous and outspoken patron of the Italian arts. She died in 1689, still unmarried.

Christina's eccentricities of manner and dress, her ambiguous political and religious position and, above all, perhaps, her status as an independent and resolutely single woman, gained her many enemies; wherever she went, scandal and rumour attached itself to her name. Not the least source of speculation was her curious sexual status; despite her passionate (and itself unorthodox) attachment to a Catholic cardinal, Christina's primary erotic interests seem to have centred upon women. She carried her affection for Ebba Sparre, for example, her beautiful lady-in-waiting, beyond Sweden and into exile. Corresponding with her from Europe in 1656, she wrote:

How happy I should be if only I could see you, Beautiful One. But I am condemned by Destiny to love and cherish you always without seeing you; and [...] I cannot be completely happy when I am separated from you. Never doubt this fact, and believe that, wherever I may be, I shall always be entirely devoted to you, as I always have been. [...] Good-bye, Beautiful One, good-bye. I embrace you a million times.¹

We shall never know the extent of the intimacy of Christina's and Ebba's embraces. Bulstrode Whitelocke, English Ambassador to Sweden in the 1650s, reported that the Queen introduced her lady-in-waiting to him as "my bed-fellowe", and invited him to enthuse with her about Ebba's charms;² but it is difficult to imagine just how Christina understood her own feelings for Ebba, and for the other women, like the Comtesse de

¹ Quoted in Margaret Goldsmith, *Christina of Sweden: A Psychological Biography* (London, 1933), p. 192. The letter she translates appears in its original form in Volume 2 of Johann Arckenholtz's *Mémoires Concernant Christine, reine de Suède* (Amsterdam and Leipzig, 1751-60).

² Bulstrode Whitelocke, *A Journal of the Swedish Embassy* (London, 1762), Vol. 1, p. 420.

Suze, she is said to have admired. What is certain is that gossip about Christina's relations with women circulated in her own day, identifying her as the aristocratic 'tribade' who, as Ros Ballaster suggests, was providing a model for female same-sex desire in satirical representation of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.³ Such gossip mainly emanated, however, from Christina's French enemies, who used accusations of lesbianism - along with allegations of heterosexual profligacy - in a general attempt to undermine her intellectual and political standing. A forged volume entitled *Lettres Secretes de Christine, Reine de Suede*, for example, appeared in 1761; this contained suggestive letters to Ebba and a French noblewoman (the latter of which begins "Adorable Marquise"⁴). More damaging were the series of slanderous pamphlets that appeared in Paris in the 1660s, one of which claims that respectable women refused to take their daughters to visit Christina, because she'd been seen putting her hand up ladies' skirts. "She is," affirms the anonymous author of the pamphlet, "one of the most ribald tribades ever heard of".⁵ These slanderous texts were to influence Christina's biographers for the next three hundred years: when they weren't citing or quoting the gossip directly, they were certainly taking Christina's reputation as lesbian or sexual libertine seriously.

As I have discussed in greater detail elsewhere, the very ambiguities of Christina's career allowed her to be reconstructed by modern biographers in a variety of forms.⁶ Nineteenth-century commentators, interpreting her via dominant narratives of nation, faith and gender, suppressed the details of her lesbian affairs, and condemned her rather for wandering unchaperoned around Europe, and neglecting her patriotic duty (Anna Jameson, for example, in her 1831 *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Sovereigns*, claims she "gave away a throne from an excess of selfishness"⁷). By the turn of the century, new sexological narratives authorised the reinsertion of lesbianism into Christina's biography - recasting her not, this time, as a libertine or tribade, but as a neurasthenic New Woman,

³ Ros Ballaster, "'The Vices of Old Rome Revived': Representations of Female Same-Sex Desire in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century England", in Suzanne Raitt (ed.), *Volcanoes and Pearl-Divers: Essays in Lesbian Feminist Studies* (London, 1995: forthcoming).

⁴ *Lettres Secretes de Christine, Reine de Suede* (Geneva, 1761), p. 90.

⁵ 'Copie d'une lettre escrite de Bruxelles à la Haye touchant la Reine de Suede', in *Histoire du Palais Royale* (Fribourg, 1667), p. 12. My translation.

⁶ Sarah Waters, "'A Girton Girl on a Throne': Queen Christina and Versions of Lesbianism, 1906-1933", *Feminist Review*, 46 (Spring 1994), pp. 41-60.

⁷ Mrs Jameson, *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Sovereigns* (London, 1831), Vol. 2, p. 1.

a mannish invert or, in Edward Carpenter's terminology, a "homogenic type".⁸

It was in the late 1920s, however - a period, as we've seen, when lesbian visibility was at a new peak - that interest in Christina, and debate over the extent and meaning of her lesbian interests, really revived. Between 1927, which saw the reissue of an English translation of the seventeenth-century *The History of the Intrigues and Gallantries of Christina, Queen of Sweden*, and 1935, when Alfred Neumann's *The Life of Christina of Sweden* appeared in an English edition, Christina's story was retold in a plethora of different versions, nearly all of which addressed her lesbian reputation in one way or another.⁹ This reputation was, evidently, particularly well-established amongst lesbians themselves. Faith Compton Mackenzie, who was intimate with the international lesbian set of the 1920s (and, at least according to some sources, in love with the pianist Renata Borgatti¹⁰), made a biography of Christina, *The Sibyl of the North* (1931), her first literary project - though, with remarkable indirection for a woman whose husband had written the candid lesbian lampoon *Extraordinary Women*, she tells us only that Christina "deigned to admire" certain ladies "almost beyond the bounds of what is compatible with admiration...".¹¹ For self-identified lesbians, Christina's example was one to be cherished and emulated. Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas confessed themselves to be "so xcited" (sic) at the prospect of moving into the Queen's old Parisian apartments - number 5 on the eponymous rue Christine - after their expulsion from their famous rue de Fleurus address in 1937.¹² Four years earlier Greta Garbo - herself, of course, bisexual (and Swedish) - had brought the Queen her widest modern audience when she played the title role in Rouben Mamoulian's *Queen Christina*. Though the film inveigles Christina into an improbable heterosexual romance, both Garbo and her lover Salka Viertel, who worked on the film's script, seem to have been attracted by the homoerotic possibilities of the story of the cross-dressing Queen; they certainly established Christina

⁸ For Carpenter's identification of Christina as a 'homogenic type' or 'intermediate', see his *Love's Coming-of-Age* (London, 1906), p. 127n.

⁹ These included: I. A. Taylor, *Christina of Sweden* (1929; a reissue, first published in 1909); Ada Harrison, *Christina of Sweden* (1929); Lucien Murat, *La Vie Amoureuse de Christine de Suede* (1930); Faith Compton Mackenzie, *The Sibyl of the North* (1931), and O. P. Gilbert, *Women in Men's Guise* (1932), which features a chapter on Christina.

¹⁰ See James Money, *Capri: island of pleasure* (London, 1986), p. 149.

¹¹ Faith Compton Mackenzie, *The Sibyl of the North: The Tale of Christina, Queen of Sweden* (London, 1931), p. 36.

¹² Diana Souhami, *Gertrude and Alice* (London, 1991), p. 314.

in a strikingly androgynous pose, which may have had a special resonance for lesbian and gay viewers of the film in the 1930s.¹³

But it is, as I suggested earlier, one particular manifestation of lesbian interest in Christina's story that I want to concentrate on here: Margaret Goldsmith's "Psychological Biography" *Christina of Sweden*, which appeared in the same year as Garbo's film, but constructs its subject, as we shall see, very differently indeed.

Like Meagher, Goldsmith was an American expatriate living in Europe. In 1927 she had been, briefly, Berlin correspondent for the *New York Evening Post*, meanwhile translating German texts, writing fiction of her own, and acting as literary agent for English authors in Germany.¹⁴ Though she had married English journalist Frederick Voigt in 1926, in the following year she met Vita Sackville-West in Berlin and embarked upon a brief affair with her. Her letters reveal the depth of her investment in their relationship;¹⁵ *Belated Adventure*, the novel which she published in 1929 - and which, like Woolf's *Orlando*, is both dedicated to, and features a charismatic female character based upon, Sackville-West - hints at the degree of her preoccupation with her new female lover. But we can only speculate on the extent to which Goldsmith identified with the category 'lesbian'; though, by 1935, she had certainly divorced Voigt, she may, like Sackville-West herself, have had intermittent lesbian experiences and only a casual involvement in the gay subcultures of Berlin and London.

What is evident from the fiction and biographies into which she channelled her literary energies from the late '20s onwards, however, is that she was preoccupied with historical figures, like Christina and Sappho, who had been implicated in homosexual intrigues; and she seems to have been particularly committed to reinscribing homosexuality into the narratives of characters whose lives had been bowdlerised or distorted by previous biographers. Her study of Frederick the Great (1929), for example, irritated a *TLS* reviewer who felt that it seemed "to insist unnecessarily" upon Frederick's

¹³ See Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York, 1981) and Andrea Weiss, *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in the Cinema* (London, 1992), for more on the film's production, and its special lesbian and gay appeal.

¹⁴ Virginia Blain, Patricia Clements and Isobel Grundy give a brief summary of Goldsmith's career in their *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English* (London, 1990), p. 436.

¹⁵ For details of the affair, and extracts from Goldsmith's letters, see Victoria Glendinning, *Vita: a Life of Vita Sackville-West* (London, 1983). Goldsmith appears in Sackville-West's letters as Peggy Voigt.

"sexual perversion";¹⁶ her "Psychological Reconstruction" of the life of Sappho (1938), is, as we shall see later, a clever elaboration upon a few scraps of poetry and historical fact which presents the poet as exclusively lesbian, and engages directly with traditional Sapphic commentary. *Venus in Scorpio* (1940), the novel she co-wrote with 'Murray Constantine' (Katherine Burdekin), retells the story of Marie Antoinette from the perspective of the Princesse de Lamballe, the Queen's devoted companion.

Both the sexual frankness and the psychoanalytic slant of Goldsmith's biographies reflect post-war changes in biographical conventions; these, as Suzanne Raitt points out, had relaxed considerably since Victorian days, and by the 1920s "assumed a certain equality between the readers of a biography, its writer, and its subject".¹⁷ In *Christina of Sweden*, it is explicitly over the issue of the Queen's sexuality that Goldsmith attempts to assert her authority, establishing herself in a privileged relationship with a lesbian Christina other commentators have failed to understand, and inviting her readers to share it. None of the Queen's previous biographers, she claims,

even serious modern writers, venture to discuss the delicate reasons prompting her to remain unmarried. They have shrunk from admitting her sexual abnormality, even though many contemporary documents, and Christina's own letters, make it quite clear that she was attracted by her own sex. Christina herself, when she was old enough to understand herself and human behaviour generally, was far more modern than even her recent biographers. 'Love,' she once wrote, 'is the essentially Protean element of Nature, an element which conceals itself behind many guises.'¹⁸

Goldsmith is right to point out both the reticence of Christina's biographers and the rigidity of the erotic poses in which, over the centuries, the Queen has been cast; like theirs, however, her own supposedly enlightened reading of the Queen's sexuality is far from protean. She gives details of the Queen's relationship with Ebba Sparre, and quotations from her passionate letters, left out of earlier biographies;¹⁹ she resurrects scandals about Christina's lesbian flings other commentators play down. But her

¹⁶ *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 February 1929, p. 151.

¹⁷ Suzanne Raitt, *Vita and Virginia: The Work and Friendship of V. Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf* (Oxford, 1993), p. 20.

¹⁸ Goldsmith, *Christina of Sweden*, p. 67. Further references will be included in the text.

¹⁹ I. A. Taylor, for example, relates in *Christina of Sweden* an incident in which the Queen asked the English ambassador Whitelocke for his opinion on Ebba's beauty; she did not, as Goldsmith does, include the fact that Christina called Ebba her "bed-fellowe".

references are selective, and her sources unreliable - she makes unqualified use of allegations from the slanderous French pamphlets, for example. She claims that rumours about Christina's courtly romances are "quite unfounded on fact" (138); she assures us that historians have been "misled" into believing that Christina and Azzolino were lovers (273). Like Meagher's, her revisionary historical project has - even while asserting its own disinterested authority - a clear lesbian agenda.

However, just as, at the turn of the century, Carpenter had recognised in Christina a "homogenic" icon, so Goldsmith's recuperation of the lesbian Queen involves re-reading her via an established homosexual paradigm. In the seventeenth century, she writes, the very "words" had not "been invented in which [Christina] could have described her inferiority complex at being born a woman, who yet did not feel towards other women as a woman should" (133); as we shall see, Goldsmith retells her story in the "words" with which gender and sexuality were, in the Europe and America of the inter-war years, being increasingly reconceptualised: those of a popularised psychoanalysis, which had inherited a Freudian discourse with none of Freud's subtlety, and which, crucially, rejected many of his most radical conclusions.

In Goldsmith's reiteration of them, the curious details of Christina's early life take on a specious logic. So masculine when she is born that she is mistaken for a boy, Christina's birth is celebrated as that of the heir her parents and the court astrologers had predicted. Her father, advised of his mistake, decides to make the best of it and orders the princess to be raised as a prince. He is delighted by her apparently natural predilection for masculine pursuits, but Christina herself grows up haunted by a feeling of inferiority and guilt which her mother, unenchanted by and increasingly alienated from her graceless daughter, does nothing to allay. She constantly upbraids her both for not having been born a boy, and for her boyishness. "No wonder", writes Goldsmith,

that Christina was a disappointment to her mother, nor that the Queen's tactless insistence on more feminine behaviour brought about the opposite results in her daughter. Unfortunately for both of them, modern psychology had not been discovered when they were alive. With a little psychological insight Marie Eleonore might have used other methods to achieve her ends, and Christina, as she matured, might have realised that, to some extent at least, her exaggerated mannishness was due to her mother's influence. (35)

Christina's father dies; she becomes more absorbed in her studies. Bewildered by her

growing physical repugnance towards the men whose intellectual company she so enjoys, she falls in love with her attendant, Ebba Sparre. Ebba, however, is beautiful but faithless, "a passive woman, with no initiative" (69) who ultimately opts for the conventional securities of heterosexuality. But the affair awakens Christina to the reality of her own nature: she "now understood her aversion to marriage" (72). Estranged from her mother and increasingly depressed and disaffected, determined not to marry and conscious of the absurdity of her place at the head of a ruling system requiring the production of heirs, Christina puts herself in voluntary exile from Sweden. "Maladjusted people," Goldsmith informs us,

whether their inner disharmony is based on a sexual conflict or some other form of ambivalence, often become expatriates. [...] they run away to some foreign country, where the symptoms of their personal maladjustment are often put down merely to the natural eccentricities of a foreigner. Montparnasse is full of human tragedies of this kind. (125-6)

Berlin, too, was full of lesbian expatriates in the early '30s, and Goldsmith was one of them. Her adoption of the voice of the homosexual apologist, soliciting heterosexual sympathy for the tragic invert, alerts us to the terms on which lesbianism is here being allowed an airing.

Goldsmith's portrait of Christina's 'disharmonious' personality made the Queen recognisable to readers already familiar with the paradigmatic scenarios of psychoanalysis. "[P]re-natal and post-natal influences had combined to develop in Christina the man-girl type of mind, if not of body", wrote the *TLS* in its summary and review of Goldsmith's book. "It would be impossible to imagine circumstances more nicely calculated to produce an inferiority complex and an abnormal sexual psychology".²⁰ Lorine Pruette, reviewing the biography for the *New York Herald Tribune*, felt, similarly, that "Christina's strange and horrible childhood would supply material for a brochure on what not to do with children, if normal adults are to be expected".²¹ Such readings reveal the extent to which Goldsmith successfully reconstructed Christina as a homosexual *type* - "the man-girl type" - which nevertheless pandered to popular fears that homosexuality might be *spread* by

²⁰ *Times Literary Supplement*, 18 May 1933, p. 341.

²¹ 'Books' section, *New York Herald Tribune*, 7 January 1934.

careless parenting.

However, though we might lament Goldsmith's reconstruction of Christina's lesbian identity via the discourse of popular psychoanalysis in which that identity is implicitly coded as deviant, and - a more serious threat to homosexual organisation - posited as curable, we must acknowledge that it is precisely her construction of her text as a "Psychological Biography" that allows her to extend the scope of her project. Stretching the boundaries of her genre into the realm of desire and the unconscious, she sanctions her own liberation from the demands of historical fidelity, allowing herself to structure Christina's story around another, quite different, modern homosexual paradigm. Over-influential father, distant mother, inappropriate education, boyishness, self-discovery and exile... As I hope my summary of her biography reveals, the story Goldsmith re-tells is, once again, the one that had been labelled "an intolerable outrage"²² and banned in Britain five years earlier: Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*. Terry Castle claims that "[v]irtually every English or American lesbian novel composed since 1928 has been in one sense or another a response to, or trespass upon, *The Well of Loneliness*";²³ the fact that Goldsmith reproduces the plot of the most famous literary defence of homosexuality in an historical biography suggests that Hall's novel had become established as a lesbian master-narrative to which even *non-fictional* representations of lesbianism were susceptible. Alternatively, we might read Goldsmith's presentation of Christina as Stephen Gordon - particularly if we place it alongside the contemporaneous *The Green Scamander*, which similarly invokes the banned novel - as an attempt to reopen a space for the articulation of lesbian desire and an implicit protest at its closure.²⁴

This, at least, is the implication of those moments when Goldsmith's discussion threatens to exceed the limits of both her biographical project and the psychoanalytic 'deviance' model she seems elsewhere to endorse. Claiming, for example, that Christina's

²² James Douglas, *The Sunday Express*, 19 August 1928; quoted by Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London, 1990), p. 108.

²³ Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York, 1993), p. 52.

²⁴ *Christina of Sweden's* links with Hall's novel - like *The Green Scamander's* - did not go unnoticed by its reviewers. Pruette's *New York Herald Tribune* review continues: "Thus much of Christina's life reads like a documented 'Well of Loneliness', with the difference that powerful environmental influences are shown at work in place of the dubious biological causation of the novel".

Swedish guardians would have been shocked had they realised the extent of her intimacy with Ebba, she explains:

For, like most puritans, they were more concerned with the two human poles, connected by a mutual devotion, than they were with the quality of this emotion itself. Had Christina pursued a rather objectionable young man with unlovely persistence, her puritan guardians would have been less incensed than they would have been had they known about her unconventional but thoroughly fine attachment to Ebba Sparre. (71)

There is clearly more at stake here than *Christina's* lesbianism. Goldsmith characterises the homosexual not just as a "thoroughly fine" but, by negative implication, as an 'unobjectionable' and even 'lovely' attachment which only "puritans" - "those convenient, all-purpose villains", as Neil Bartlett, writing about a different but similarly imaginative homosexual biography, calls them - would seek to censure.²⁵ Hardly a radical lesbian statement, but - in the wake of the *Well* trial - surely a pointed, and certainly a provocative, one. Readers who had been satisfied with Goldsmith's portrayal of Christina's deviant upbringing were less happy with her defence of the adult Queen's affection for her lady-in-waiting, interpreting it - quite rightly, as I'm suggesting - as a breach of biographical propriety: "we see no justification", wrote her *TLS* reviewer, "for Mrs. Goldsmith's description of [Christina's] Lesbian passion for Ebba Sparre as 'a thoroughly fine attachment'". And though Goldsmith's blatant special pleading seems to sit uncomfortably alongside her description of homosexuals as "human tragedies", then we might remember that *The Well of Loneliness*, her ur-text, is similarly shot through with contradiction and inconsistency.²⁶

'Sensitive and discriminating': *Sappho of Lesbos*

As she did in *Christina of Sweden*, Goldsmith offers her biography of Sappho as an

²⁵ Neil Bartlett, *Who Was That Man?: A Present for Mr Oscar Wilde* (London, 1988), p. 194. Bartlett uses the phrase in a discussion of Wilde's *The Portrait of Mr W. H.*, which laments "The Puritans'" attack on the transvestite English theatre.

²⁶ Jean Radford discusses the range of sexological and literary models informing *The Well* in her 'An inverted romance: *The Well of Loneliness* and sexual ideology', in Jean Radford (ed.), *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction* (London and New York, 1986), pp. 97-111.

authoritative version which displaces all previous accounts. Once again, at the heart of her revisionary biography is lesbianism - "men", she claims, "made no emotional appeal to [Sappho] whatsoever"²⁷ - and she condemns earlier biographers for obscuring the facts of Sappho's career and endorsing the apocryphal story of Phaon.

It was obvious why many of these historians, who made a study of Sappho's life, and her death, were willing unquestioningly to accept the Phaon legend. These historians were all men, and they naturally preferred to believe that, at the close of her life, at least, this great women found a man necessary to her happiness. [...] These historians, in other words, none of whom were apparently experts in the psychology of extraordinary women, judged her quite arbitrarily, adjusting their opinions to their prejudices. They never took into account her own point of view, so clearly expressed in every one of her poems.
(271-2)

Like Vivien, she pits her Sapphic narrative against patriarchal interpretative tradition: in her version, Sappho kills herself not out of unrequited love for a man, but in a culmination of the long period of depression into which she is plunged by the desertion of Atthis.

As in her study of Christina, however, the charge which Goldsmith levels against her rival biographers - that of bringing a hidden agenda to their apparently objective accounts, and "adjusting their opinions to their prejudices" - is one of which she is herself particularly culpable. Labelling her study once again a "psychological" biography, and making it clear moreover in a preface to the book that her account of the mythologised Sappho is, of necessity, "largely imaginative", she authorises her own role as Sapphic interpreter: "I have tried to describe Sappho's life as it appears to me," she writes, "as I myself am convinced that she must have lived it" (v). The resulting narrative has all the cohesion and internal logic of a modern case-study, as Sappho marries (for expediency's sake) an effeminate man, undergoes the trauma of the wedding-night to provide him with a much longed-for child, experiences her greatest passion in the arms of a series of female lovers, and ultimately devotes her time and energy to young women as a respected pedagogue. Moreover, into this imaginative plot Goldsmith weaves, at strategic moments, fragments of Sappho's own verse - as here, for example, when Sappho has met Erinna, her future lover, for the first time, and is overwhelmed by desire:

²⁷ Margaret Goldsmith, *Sappho of Lesbos: A Psychological Reconstruction of her Life* (London, 1938), p. 62. Further references will be included in the text.

She welcomed the emotions which swept through her, but at the same time she was frightened.

'As for me,' she wrote rather helplessly, 'love has shaken my wits as a down-rushing whirlwind falls upon the oaks.' (140)

Such unqualified extraction of Sappho's fragments from their original context - in which, as Mary Mills Patrick, another early twentieth-century Sapphic biographer, points out, they may well have been simply literary exercises or even parts of wedding-songs²⁸ - is really very crafty indeed. The lesbian agenda of Goldsmith's biography was, as before, not lost on her reviewers - who, once again, testified to the power of Hall's novel as both homosexual prototype and lesbian euphemism, by placing *Sappho of Lesbos* in the "school of *The Well of Loneliness*".²⁹

While the similarities between *Sappho* and the *Well* are no more than thematic, another influential lesbian novel of 1928 is unmistakably echoed in Goldsmith's text: Compton Mackenzie's scurrilous Caprian *roman à clef*, with whose heroines Goldsmith allies her own when she claims, as we've seen, that none of Sappho's historians were capable of understanding "extraordinary women". The identification of Radclyffe Hall with the novel - a 1929 advertisement in the *New York World* announced (wrongly) that she, "herself [...] an EXTRAORDINARY WOMAN", made an appearance in the text³⁰ - suggests that Mackenzie's title was indeed proving to be as servicable a lesbian euphemism as Hall's own; it would certainly have been available as such to an author as well-versed in homosexual tropes as Goldsmith.

Originally entitled *The Ladies of Mitylene*, *Extraordinary Women* made Sapphic lesbianism a primary satirical target: its chapters are all headed by fragments of Sappho's verse, which offer a euphuistic running commentary on the lesbian antics which follow; Rory Freemantle, vainly in love with the lesbian rake Rosalba Donsante, names her villa 'Leucadia', after the Greek headland from which Sappho is alleged to have thrown herself.³¹ Goldsmith's reiteration of the novel's title, however, rescues the full force of the 'extraordinary' rendered comical by Mackenzie, and reaffirms the link between

²⁸ Mary Mills Patrick, *Sappho and the Island of Lesbos* (London, 1912).

²⁹ From a review of *Sappho of Lesbos* in the *London Mercury*, 38 (1938), p. 98.

³⁰ Quoted in Michael Baker, *Our Three Selves: A Life of Radclyffe Hall* (London, 1985), p. 254.

³¹ For more on the origins of *Extraordinary Women*, and the correlations between it and the Caprian lesbian community, see Money, *Capri*.

ancient and modern lesbian practice - between Sapphism and sapphism - which he debunks. This is partly an effect of Goldsmith's biographical perspective - she implies the existence of an invariable transhistorical lesbian "psychology"; but it is also a feature of her feminist project - indeed, we might think of her persistent biographical conflation of history and fiction less as an anachronistic *imposition* of modern sexual models upon the past, than as an *invitation* to the lesbian ancestor to participate in contemporary lesbian culture (effectively, as 'Stephen Gordon', as an 'extraordinary woman') in its most topical forms. Much less equivocally than the biography of Christina, *Sappho of Lesbos* offers itself as a defence of lesbianism, recuperating its subject as a lesbian feminist heroine - a heroine maligned by subsequent, intolerant generations from which the reader is implicitly invited to disidentify: she "could not foretell that the time would come when her form of personal self-expression, sensitive and discriminating as it was in itself, would be censured to the extent of causing educated people to burn her poems" (155-6).

The image of Sappho's sensitive lesbian literature being set to the censoring/censoring flame might, once again, recall the events surrounding the *Well of Loneliness* trial, in which copies of Hall's novel had been seized by Customs and the police and, when judged unfit for publication, destroyed; it certainly forges a bond between lesbians across the hostilities and intolerances of history. But it also, in this 1938 text, recalls more recent political bonfires: Goldsmith had, of course, strong German connections and, evidently, anti-Nazi sympathies. In 1934 she translated *Why I Left Germany*, the autobiography of an anonymous German Jew, which itself culminates in a description of the massive burning of 'un-German' books (including those homosexual testimonies from Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science) before the Berlin Opera House in 1933; Katherine Burdekin, with whom she was to collaborate on *Venus in Scorpio*, had, as 'Murray Constantine', produced a feminist critique of Nazism - *Swastika Night* (1937) - a year before *Sappho's* publication. In Burdekin's elaborate dystopia Nazi Germany controls half of the globe, and worships Hitler as a god; women are kept, degraded and enslaved, purely for breeding purposes. Male society resembles ancient Greece, with the boundaries between homosocial and homosexual interests dissolved: its elite inner circle of Nazi 'Knights' constitutes, amongst other things, a disturbing realisation of the Hellenist/Chivalric fantasies of Kains Jackson, Paine, and the 'Community of the Special'. Like Burdekin, Goldsmith simultaneously attacks Nazi sexual

ideology and exposes the fascist tendencies of the Hellenist paradigm. When Sappho is banished from Lesbos as a result of her political activities, she is reluctant to leave: "Women," Goldsmith tells us,

in most cities of the Greek Empire, were told to be satisfied with painting pretty vases and embroidering nice temple-clothes. [...] In other words, the activities of women were restricted to the same three ks, *Kinder*, *Küche* and *Kirche* - children, kitchen and the church - so honoured by their sex in Prussia twenty-five centuries later. (94)

Like Psappha's island in Vivien's poetry, and like Meagher's Amazonia, Goldsmith's ancient Lesbos is crucially peripheral to the Greek - and to the modern - fatherland.

The feminist agenda of Goldsmith's biographies - the welcoming of the historical subject into a subversive lesbian feminist community she herself might be understood to have inaugurated - is even more overt in Mary Gordon's *Chase of the Wild Goose*. If *Christina of Sweden* and *Sappho of Lesbos* claim their heroines for a modern lesbian movement, Gordon's biography of the Ladies of Llangollen - the Irish lovers, Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, who 'eloped' to Wales and set up house together in the late eighteenth century - brings biographer and subject together in transhistorical lesbian *collusion*.

Lesbian mediums: *Chase of the Wild Goose*

By the time she came to write *Chase of the Wild Goose* in 1936, Mary Gordon - then in her seventies - had had a long career working with and for women in a variety of capacities. She was one of the earliest women doctors, and, in 1907, became the first female Inspector of Prisons; she used her influence in this post to effect some minor changes in the treatment of imprisoned suffragettes - securing them, according to Sylvia Pankhurst, sun-bonnets (in response to complaints about exercise-yard fainting in the heat wave of 1908), notebooks and pencils, and abolishing "the unsanitary wooden spoon".³² Her fictionalised biography of the Ladies of Llangollen was, as we shall see, inspired by

³² Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette* (London, 1911), p. 256. See also her *The Suffragette Movement* (London, 1931), pp. 286-7.

a remarkable experience at Plas Newydd, the Ladies' Llangollen home - an experience which was both the product and the fulfilment of Gordon's lifelong feminist interests.

Like Meagher's, Gordon's project was, in part, the identification of lesbian originals, lesbian pioneers; her Eleanor and Sarah have, as it were, to make lesbianism up as they go along, and their plans to establish a 'Plas Newydd' - a 'New Place' - together are threatened, initially, not just by the families who wish to see them respectably married off, but by sheer lack of precedent:

'[Think] of the cost of liberty, Sarah. Loss of the friends of our order, perhaps loss of one another, perhaps we should have to endure illness and poverty - and poverty for life. I should destroy my parents' hopes, and they would never forgive me. We should go on what the world calls a wild-geese chase. Could I take you to such a life?'

'I want to hear you say I may chase the wild geese with you. God would help us.'

'Well, we must wait a little longer until you are of age. Then - if you want me - I will come for you. I only hesitate to expose you to all the difficulties. But I promise you that after this time we will never part again. You are all the world to me, Sally.'³³

As its title suggests, the image of the wild goose is an important one in Gordon's text. The book's original dust-jacket, designed for the Hogarth Press by Vanessa Bell, features a sketch of the Ladies, characteristically top-hatted but - in a revision of the two well-known portraits - in a close embrace, and gazing at a flying goose.³⁴ As we shall see later, Gordon was influenced by Jung, and may have fixed on the bird for its symbolic qualities: the flying goose is an ancient motif, associated with shamanistic trance and transcendence; Jung calls the bird image in general "a symbol of 'wishful thinking'".³⁵ Jung's definitions only compound the wild goose's status in popular discourse, where to chase such a bird is, of course, to embark on an impossible or fruitless endeavour. Eleanor's description of the perils attendant upon the unorthodox union, and her spirited defiance of them, may have struck a chord with Gordon's contemporary lesbian readers,

³³ Mary Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose* (London, 1936), p. 53. Further references will be included in the text.

³⁴ The two extant portraits of the Ladies, reproduced in most of the biographies (including Gordon's), show them seated in their study and standing in their garden, close together but not touching. For a reproduction of the *Chase* jacket see J. Howard Woolmer, *A Checklist of the Hogarth Press, 1917-1946* (Revere, Penn., 1986), p. 133. Gordon herself apparently disliked Bell's design. "I suppose", she wrote to Leonard Woolf at the Hogarth Press, "the artist [...] ought not to be shot for doing her best": MS letter dated 22 May 1936; Hogarth Press collection, Reading University.

³⁵ Joseph Campbell, *The Flight of the Wild Gander* (New York, 1990), pp. 165-166; Carl Jung, *Symbols of Transformation* (London, 1970), p. 246n.

for whom the pursuit of romance was still, in the eyes of the dominant culture, something of a wild-goose chase.

It may also have recalled to them *Orlando*, which ends, of course, on the image of a "single, wild [...] goose".³⁶ As we've seen, *Orlando* was an influential text. Gordon herself had certainly read it, and perhaps fully intended the parallel between Woolf's 'biography' and her own;³⁷ in 1937 she had even, according to a letter to Leonard Woolf at the Hogarth Press, "half-finished" a kind of sequel to his wife's novel - "the hero being a son of [...] Orlando and a spiritual son of Hermaphroditus".³⁸ Though Leonard Woolf, at least, may have been vastly relieved when Gordon later failed to produce the threatened manuscript, there would have been a kind of poetic justice in its production: the lesbian lovers who formed the subject of Gordon's biography had figured in the germ of *Orlando* itself. "Two women, poor, solitary at the top of a house", wrote Woolf in her diary in 1927, describing her first vision of 'The Jessamy Brides' (*Orlando*'s original title).

One can see anything (for this is all fantasy) the Tower Bridge, clouds, aeroplanes. Also old men listening in a room over the way. Everything is to be tumbled in pall mall. It is to be written as I write letters at the top of my speed: on the Ladies of Llangollen; on Mrs Fladgate; on people passing. No attempt is to be made to realise the character. Sapphism is to be suggested. Satire is to be the main note - satire & wildness. The Ladies are to have Constantinople in view. Dreams of golden domes.³⁹

Woolf, like Gordon, may have been intrigued by the Ladies' proto-lesbian status, their ambiguous erotic reputation (Wordsworth immortalised them as "Sisters in love"; Hester Thrale called them "damned Sapphists"⁴⁰). As the final, intriguing, section of Gordon's biography reveals, though *Orlando* and *Chase* are linked by little more than the wild goose symbol, Gordon clearly shared Woolf's original impulse to remove the Ladies from their historical context and insert them into a lesbian fantasy.

Gordon had revisited Llangollen after more than fifty years in response to a vivid dream of the ruined Valle Crucis Abbey, which was nearby. She was at this time staying

³⁶ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (London, 1977), p. 205.

³⁷ One reader at least noted Woolf's "influence" on Gordon's biography: see David Garnett's review of *Chase of the Wild Goose* in *The New Statesman and Nation*, 6 June 1936, p. 896.

³⁸ MS letter to Leonard Woolf, 18 February 1937; Hogarth Press collection, University of Reading.

³⁹ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. III: 1925-1930* (London, 1980), p. 131.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Lilian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, p. 121; quoted in Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, p. 150.

with Jung in Bollingen, and, according to Elizabeth Mavor, it was Jung himself who suggested she make the trip to Wales.⁴¹ Gordon's dedication of *Chase of the Wild Goose* to Emma Jung, however - "with affectionate regards" - suggests that she may have been more influenced by Jung's wife. But whatever the impetus for Gordon's journey, it was to provide her with "the most vivid and remarkable experience I had ever had in my life" (241). In the final part of her book, a section called 'The Ladies Meet Me', she describes her encounter with the Ladies of Llangollen themselves, a century after their death.

On a tour of Plas Newydd (owned, in the twentieth century, by Llangollen Town Council), Gordon feels the invisible presences of Eleanor and Sarah accompanying her around their house and garden. Over the next few months, she does some research into the Ladies' lives, reading their own journal (in the form of the recently published *The Hamwood Papers*⁴²), and all available biographies. The latter, however, "which all repeated in some form or another idle or malicious conjectures and irresponsible statements" (241), disappoint her, and prompt her to write her own, revisionary, version of the Ladies' lives. She makes an extraordinary claim, however, for her own biographical authority. Revisiting Llangollen, she awakes one morning and is impelled towards the hillside path on which the Ladies took their daily stroll.

I had gone about twenty paces when I was suddenly startled by the short bark of a dog, and there, only a dozen steps away from me on the path, I saw the Ladies. [...] Just at the moment I saw them they turned their heads and appeared to see me. They were sitting so still that I thought they were in some kind of sleep, but in a couple of seconds they seemed to wake, and touched one another as if to call attention to my advent, and peered at me as though they were uncertain of my reality. I halted in my advance so that they could look at me, and in the course of about ten seconds I had a good look at them. (243)

She introduces herself; both parties are a little bewildered as to why their paths should, so improbably, have crossed. Gordon asks them if, perhaps, they have not "searched" for her; "'We have certainly looked for someone'", Miss Ponsonby replies. "'For some months we could not find anyone. We felt you - but we couldn't see or hear you'" (252). Gordon tells them a little about their changing reputation, the publication of their journal

⁴¹ Elizabeth Mavor, *The Ladies of Llangollen* (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 210-211. Mavor's text contains several glaring mistakes, and is far from reliable; she refers throughout to Gordon's biography as *Flight of the Wild Goose*, for example.

⁴² Mrs G. H. Bell (ed.), *The Hamwood Papers of the Ladies of Llangollen, and Caroline Hamilton* (London, 1930).

and the various misrepresentations of their careers. The Ladies seem perturbed, but ultimately rather detached. The three women agree to meet, the following night, at Plas Newydd, to discuss matters further.

Before I go on to examine the remarkable conversation enjoyed by Gordon and her lesbian ghosts on their midnight tryst, I want to consider the particular homosexual context in which, I think, Gordon's text can most usefully be placed. Many women writers of the early twentieth century - Amy Lowell, Renée Vivien, Radclyffe Hall - were preoccupied with their long-dead lesbian forbears; for some women, too - Charlotte Moberly and Eleanor Jourdain, for example, who had a strange encounter with the (reputedly lesbian) Marie Antoinette, at Versailles in 1901⁴³ - preoccupation seemed to be uncannily realised. Like them, Gordon imagines herself entering a continuum of transhistorical lesbian experience, and communing unproblematically with the lesbian originals who reside there. As I suggested in chapter 4, such a vision was the natural form of an historiography which, unlike that of homosexual men, had no documented traditions around which to structure itself; but male writers, too, had a considerable investment in more mystical historical models.

In 'Intimacy', for example, one of the 'Prose Sketches' of his 1916 *Dream Comrades*, Leonard Green describes an encounter with "haunted" Gloucestershire, in which "the penetrating influence of ages long passed caught hold of me, where my soul seemed in inexhaustible communion with other souls, whilst my body walked on unaccompanied".⁴⁴ The experience takes place when Green is alone, in an eerie rural setting. His account echoes more traditional ghost stories, both fictional and non-fictional, which were enjoying a new vogue in the wake of the First World War, but lends the genre a distinctly homosexual flavour: the path he takes is far from the "main roads", "remote and seldom trod by strangers, mentioned in no guide books, visited as a rule by none but the dwellers there" (9); the landscape is a suggestive, eroticised one: "at the bottom of [a] combe", near "Two breasts of grassy earth" with a "brown track in the

⁴³ For the fullest original account of this, see Elizabeth Morison and Frances Lamont [pseud. Charlotte Anne Moberly and Eleanor Jourdain], *An Adventure* (London, 1924). For an analysis of the adventure, and details of other Marie Antoinette hauntings, see Terry Castle's 'Marie Antoinette Obsession', in her *The Apparitional Lesbian*, pp. 107-49.

⁴⁴ Leonard Green, *Dream Comrades and Other Prose Sketches* (Oxford, 1916), pp. 8-9. Further references will be included in the text.

dimple between them like a tired lover" (12). Here, in a sudden, strange silence, he witnesses "the passing of a great host" - a ghostly body of men, Roman or English soldiers, retreading an ancient, forgotten highway.

Its concentration was extraordinary, or rather the vividness of my apprehension of it. I was caught away by the force of it; it emptied me of all indefinite, unassociated things. In some way I was made a partner in the quest, whatever it was, and I was welcomed.

That was another curious thing; the friendliness of that great host. For though it seemed to be all round me for miles and miles, and over me, and through me, though it moved rapidly with this wonderful concentration, a great friendliness seemed to radiate from it too. That is why I think it was an army: the comradeship.

I got up and went on; and all that day the 'friendship of the happy dead' seemed to be with me. (13-14)

Green's account, which is saturated with the vocabulary of homosexuality as 'comrades' and 'friends' at the turn of the century had reshaped it, gives us a sense of the way in which a spiritual encounter might answer highly specific gender and sexual needs (and even national ones: his essentially English vision perhaps offers an alternative homoerotic tradition to the dominant Greek one) in the 'haunted' subject.

For Green, as for Gordon, the spiritual realm clearly constituted an alternative, welcoming zone over which the laws of the 'real' world - whether temporal or spatial, moral or juridical - held no sway. This vague and mutable realm was imagined by different commentators in different ways, and approached through a variety of disciplines. Critics have highlighted the curious Catholic conversions of figures like Renée Vivien, Christopher St. John, Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge - acts which were echoed (indeed, sometimes even inspired by) similar conversions on the part of homosexual men.⁴⁵ Suzanne Raitt, noting the shared mystical encounters of women such as Vita Sackville-West and Gwen St. Aubyn, Annie Besant and Helena Blavatsky, H.D. and Bryher, identifies a "social and cultural tradition" in which lesbian and mystic or religious experiences were enjoyed, by many women, simultaneously.⁴⁶ Gordon's encounter with

⁴⁵ See Joanne Glasgow, 'What's a Nice Lesbian Like You Doing in the Church of Torquemada? Radclyffe Hall and Other Catholic Converts', in Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow (eds.), *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions* (New York, 1990), pp. 241-54. For more on male homosexual enthusiasts in the Catholic and Anglo-Catholic Churches, see Timothy d'Arch Smith, *Love in Earnest* (London, 1970) and David Hilliard, 'UnEnglish and Unmanly: Anglo-Catholicism and Homosexuality', in *Victorian Studies*, 25 (2) (Winter 1982), pp. 181-210.

⁴⁶ Raitt, *Vita and Virginia*, p. 134.

the Ladies of Llangollen drew upon a variety of mystical disciplines. Her visit, as we've seen, was inspired by a dream, whose meaning she pursued on the advice of the Jungs (Jung, too, had had a startling encounter with a female ghost in a haunted house in 1920⁴⁷); she also claims in the biography that she bore an uncanny physical likeness to Sarah Ponsonby, and hints at a possible reincarnational link between them.⁴⁸ But her experience might best be understood, perhaps, in the context of spiritualism.

Spiritualist interest was at its peak in Britain and the U.S. in the 1860s, '70s and '80s, but it had achieved a renewed popularity with the grieving British generation of the post-war period. In both eras, spiritualism achieved only a very tenuous claim to respectability. From its beginnings in the nineteenth century, it had attracted, and been accused of harbouring, social and sexual nonconformists; certainly the spiritualist meeting or séance was frequently the scene of assignation, physical contact, and sexual voyerism and display. As Ruth Brandon's study of *The Spiritualists* reveals, lesbians and gay men were capable of appropriating the séance's highly-charged emotional atmosphere for their own homoerotic purposes; she notes the particular influence exerted over a variety of aristocratic young men by the celebrated medium D. D. Home, for example, and the intimacy between Eva Carrière and Juliette Bisson - the former of whom, in private spiritualist sessions with the latter, produced suggestive ectoplasmic excrescences from her nipples, navel and vagina.⁴⁹

Spiritualist enquiry was certainly a popular homosexual pastime, attracting figures as diverse as John Moray Stuart-Young and John Gambril Nicholson (both Boy-Love poets), H.D., Edith Ellis, Edith Somerville and 'Martin Ross' - who 'co-authored' fifteen novels together, via a medium, after the latter's death in 1915 - and, perhaps most

⁴⁷ Jung contributed an account of his experience to Fanny Moser's *Spuk: Irrglaube Oder Wahrglaube* (*Ghost: False Belief or True*) (1950). The account is reprinted in his *The Symbolic Life* (London and Henley, 1977), pp. 320-26.

⁴⁸ Reincarnation, too, had its fair share of lesbian and gay enthusiasts, in both real life and fiction. As we saw in chapter 2, 'A Schoolmaster' imagines in *A Boy's Absence* that he and his young beloved "were friends before/ We lived our present lives"; similarly Alan, in 'A. T. Fitzroy's *Despised and Rejected* (London, 1988; first published 1918), feels that he and his lover Dennis "'fought side by side before now. In ancient Greece, perhaps, or Rome'" (p. 289). Hall, of course, plays with the idea of reincarnation as a possible explanation for the lesbian phenomenon in the title story of her collection *Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself* (London, 1934). See also her earlier poems, 'Re-Incarnation', in *A Sheaf of Verses* (1908), and 'The Lost Word', in *Songs of Three Counties* (1913).

⁴⁹ Ruth Brandon, *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London, 1983). See pp. 65-70 on Home, and Chapter 5, 'Why Ectoplasm?' on Carrière and Bisson.

famously of all, Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge.⁵⁰ To understand the appeal of the spiritualist phenomenon for lesbians in particular we might consider Alex Owen's analysis of the movement in her study *The Darkened Room*. Owen highlights the centrality of women and girls in nineteenth-century spiritualist circles: she examines the ways in which the spiritualist mechanisms of the séance and the public display of 'speaking spirit' simultaneously endorsed a traditional ideology of femininity, and allowed women to subvert it. The séance was a peculiarly domestic affair - an 'at home' in which the curious or the grieving were invited to participate as 'sitters' - and as such was seen to be a suitably feminine event; the medium was an instrument of the spirit world, the embodiment of receptivity and passivity: once again women were perceived as being ideally suited to this task. But the séance allowed the female medium - under the possession, for example, of a disorderly, often male, spirit - to indulge in a variety of unfeminine acts. 'Speaking spirit' gave women access to a public forum in which to exercise rights that were denied them in everyday life:

the abdication of responsibility that it represented sometimes gave rise to flagrantly transgressive outbreaks of language and sentiments. If utterance was central to the business of mediumship, giving voice to the unutterable was another of its trademarks.⁵¹

This was a form of transgressive behaviour in which the female medium was "never culpable". But precisely because "the authoritative voice was not her own", empowerment of the woman spiritualist was limited: "If mediumship was a form of contestation and subversion, it was one which ultimately could not be owned".⁵²

If these were the terms of the spiritualist project as it was established in the nineteenth century, then it is not difficult to see the appeal of the phenomenon for lesbians of the twentieth, who were, as we've seen, attempting to articulate the unimaginable in the face of censorship and prosecution. To claim a supernatural link between oneself and

⁵⁰ D'Arch Smith, *Love in Earnest*, p. 208. Barbara Guest, *Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and Her World* (New York, 1984), p. 260. Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian*, p. 247n. Baker, *Our Three Selves*.

⁵¹ Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Nineteenth Century England* (London, 1989), p. 212. See also Judith Walkowitz's chapter on 'Science and the Séance' in her *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London, 1992).

⁵² Owen, *The Darkened Room*, p. 233.

a dead lesbian lover, ancestor or precursor is, of course, to invoke an authority that can never be challenged, and an eroticism that flouts prohibition and evades suppression: as Castle points out, apparitions are simultaneously nebulous and resilient, "endlessly capable of 'appearing'".⁵³ It is also to establish an alternative model of history itself: for Gordon, as for Goldsmith, the empathic modern lesbian - the lesbian medium, we might say - has a greater historiographical authority than the patriarchal commentator.

To keep her assignation with the Ladies, Gordon has to break into Plas Newydd under cover of darkness. She waits in the silent house, thinking and dozing; the Ladies, a little late, once again appear. This time they discuss, at length, the changes of the past century. The setting - the Ladies' darkened study - is that of the séance; but the roles - of medium, spirit and questioning sitter - are curiously unstable. Gordon is, surely, the medium of the Ladies' appearance; but it is clearly she, not them, who is in control of the 'utterances' here. She claims to know instinctively what her listeners will want to hear: their supernatural appearance becomes the 'medium' of a very specific debate.

How was I to tell these two about the last hundred years? It could not advantage them to hear of Queen Victoria, of the Chartist riots, the Indian Mutiny, the Ashanti, or South African or Great Wars. Nor of Mr. Gladstone nor Mr. Disraeli. Nor could I expect railways and radio and battleships and aeroplanes to interest them. They had passed out of this kind of history. What they were missing and seeking was to adjust themselves to the life and thought of the women of this day - their own future in Time. (263-4)

She tells them about changes in the divorce laws, about the Married Women's Property Act, of suffragism, the winning of the vote, in which she herself played an active part. The Ladies, like reassured mourners, are overcome; slowly they and Gordon are exchanging roles.

The eyes of the Ladies were burning like stars in the dim room as they drank in what I related. [...] As she faced the moonlit window, I saw the tears run down Lady Eleanor's face. This tale was bringing her back to life; she was not dead, but sleeping. (264)

Gordon is fulfilling the role of ghostly augur for these long-dead romantic friends, rather than the other way around: their meeting will end at cock-crow, when she will make her

⁵³ Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian*, p. 63.

escape from the house like the revenant of supernatural tradition, helped over the threshold by Sarah Ponsonby.

In the very specific "kind of history" invoked by Gordon, the Ladies have an honoured place. In these closing chapters, she, Eleanor and Sarah fulfill a continuum of feminist expectation and retrospection: Gordon presents her own, fully-enfranchised society as the realisation of the Ladies' eighteenth-century proto-feminist vision - "'We dreamed of a better world [for women]'", confides Sarah Ponsonby (249); the Ladies themselves are understood as the inspiration for generations of resisting women. "'I am especially glad'", Gordon tells them,

'to be able to refer back to the eighteenth century in order to record my acknowledgement to it.'

'Wasteful, unbelieving cynics that we were!'

'No, no. There were pioneers to whom we feel infinitely grateful. We have sometimes told them so.'

'Oh! May we ask who those were.'

'Your two selves, for instance!'

'Ourselves! Just consider our lives!'

'Just what we have been doing ever since we knew you through your journal and saw its total incompatibility with anything that had been said about you. And before we had that, you were there for us. Is it nothing to have shown the world a perfect love... to have shown it in your darkest times... to be showing it now after a hundred years? That was indeed doing your bit. Had you any idea how many women have been on a pilgrimage to this little old house of yours? Silently, saying nothing to anybody - but they came. A girl of seventeen came once. She is here again in her seventy-fifth year.'

'But what did we *do* ?'

'You made the way straight for the time that we inherited. You meditated among your books and dreamed us into existence. You handed on to us your passionate love of freedom plus honour.'

They are, she tells them, "'our spiritual progenitors'" (269).

Spiritual progeniture: this, as I've suggested in previous chapters, was a central concept in the new discourses of homosexual self-definition that emerged in direct reaction to medicalising 'inversion' theories. Denied access to (or, indeed, unwilling to embrace) the procreative paradigm around which heterosexual culture organises itself and its history, lesbians and gay men have constructed alternative models of identity, partnership and tradition. These models affirm a flexible cultural or spiritual, rather than biological, intimacy between past and present same-sex lovers: while Vivien's Psappha is "reborn" in lesbian embraces, Gordon's Ladies are responsible for 'dreaming' modern feminists "into existence". For lesbians, indeed, so often vilified in homophobic discourse

as non- or anti-maternal, the appeal of the concept of 'spiritual progeniture' has been a particularly compelling one. Gordon is happy to be able to reassure the Ladies that women are no longer under the kind of pressures that they experienced.

'[If] a woman is the marrying kind she does marry. If she has not the genius for it she is better not doing it. No one thinks it remarkable now if two friends prefer to live together. They do so all over the country. You two friends would be no exception nowadays.'

'And poor working women?'

'Some poor working women choose it too.' (266)

And she goes on to tell them about birth-control:

'Devices have been popularized which enable married people to avoid large families. [...] A great many married people do not want to have any children at all, and do not have them. They have of course no reason for finding fault with the friendships of women which are from the point of view of population no less sterile alliances than their own -

'What, as a doctor, do you think about it?'

'As a doctor, nothing. It is not a question for me at all. But as a student of natural science, I think that, when such a powerful instinct as the parental instinct chills down to zero, Nature has her own good reasons for the phenomenon. A phenomenon which coincides with other changed conditions but is not, I think, a result of them. But a child should not accidentally choose these people as parents.'

Silence fell between us again, and after a long pause I said, 'A writer on such subjects has reminded his readers that children of the spirit can be of more value to the world than children of the flesh.'

Lady Eleanor's large, serious eyes rested on my face. She took her friend's hand and held it.

'Miss Ponsonby and I are finding all you say incredibly good news.' (266-7)

In the light of the other texts considered in this chapter and the last, it should have come as no surprise that the closing pages of Gordon's historical biography involve a confrontation with sexological debate. The writer to whom Gordon alludes here is, presumably, Carpenter; like him, she defends homosexuality by appropriating the modern, liberal discourse of non-procreative sex.

Despite - or perhaps because of - the fantastic nature of its claims, *Chase of the Wild Goose* is in many ways a model lesbian historical fiction, doing things which the other texts we have looked at do more covertly: recalling lesbian heroines, engaging them in conversation, and impelling the ensuing dialogue along radical routes. As I noted in chapter 4, it has, since the appearance of Gubar's important 'Sapphistries' article, become

commonplace to celebrate the 'fantastic collaborations' between modernist lesbian writers and their foremother Sappho. As that chapter revealed, Sappho's role in lesbian writing has never been consistent, and has sometimes been surprising; the texts discussed here suggest, further, that while 'collaboration' was indeed a dominant and empowering lesbian fantasy, it was restricted neither to the Sapphic poet, nor to the modernist, but indulged in by a range of writers whose historical icons were often both more local than Sappho, and more appropriable to popular literary and lesbian models. As we shall see in the following two chapters, women writers - both lesbian and heterosexual - have frequently been less interested in recovering distinctly feminist traditions, than in reinscribing *male* homosexuality into historical narrative.

CHAPTER 7

III Husbands: Homosexuals in the Historical Romance of the 1950s

We "must all agree", wrote John Raymond in *The New Statesman and Nation* in 1957,

that there is no time like the present for the historical novel in all its variety and richness. For some curious reason - perhaps because, though just as scholarly, they are less fettered to the ideals of pure pedantry - almost all the writers who have made their names in this *genre* since the war have been women. The roll-call of their achievements, in the last ten years, is extraordinary. Building firmly on the foundations of the Thirties [...] they have raised a succession of enduring works of art.¹

The mid-century monopolisation of historical fiction by women writers was indeed extraordinary. Raymond notes some of the more highbrow authors - Naomi Mitchison, Rose Macaulay, M. M. Kaye - but on a popular level, too, the historical genre had, by the 1950s, been revised and reshaped by a generation of female novelists: Margaret Irwin, Jean Plaidy and Georgette Heyer, amongst others; Norah Lofts, Anya Seton and Margaret Campbell Barnes. Part of the appeal of the genre for women writers may have lain, as Raymond perceives, in its particular combination of scholarship and fantasy; as Bryher herself pointed out in 1963,

Say what you will, no woman yet has had the same opportunities as a man to use her mind. I have always been handicapped in writing because, although due to some psychological training I know what a lumberman thinks, it is impossible for me to stay beside him while he works or drinks and listen to his conversation. [...] Social taboos have cut me off from much of the material that I should have liked to use.²

¹ John Raymond, 'Books in General', *The New Statesman and Nation*, 6 April 1957, pp. 445-6.

² Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis: A Writer's Memoirs* (London, 1963), pp. 120-1.

While access to the less ladylike zones of contemporary experience has often been denied them, women have been at liberty to range imaginatively through the past; by "raiding history" their fiction could, as Alison Light points out, "be both popular and respectable".³ It could also be challenging: many of the stories which women have chosen to tell are those *female* stories overlooked by traditional historiography; many women's historical novels are, indeed, *retellings* of stories already established in apparently authoritative versions by men: Margaret Irwin's *The Proud Servant* (1934), for example, which, as Margaret Crosland notes, retreads ground covered by John Buchan in *Montrose* six years earlier; Helen Waddell's *Peter Abelard* (1933), which rewrites George Moore's *Héloise and Abelard* of 1921.⁴

Although, in my Introduction, I questioned the value of those categories - historical 'novel', historical 'romance', 'period' novel - into which critics tend to subdivide the historical genre, it is nevertheless useful to distinguish between the two main forms into which the historical novel was, at mid-century, and under women's considerable influence, more firmly impelled. The first of these is preoccupied with the *strangeness* of the past: it understands history as a series of radically different cultural moments, and explores the tensions and transitions between them. Naomi Mitchison refined this form in the 1920s; she pioneered a presentation of the ancient past in a modern idiom which avoided the 'gadzookery' of the nineteenth-century historical novel, and paradoxically made the unfamiliar historical setting stranger still. Her example was emulated in subsequent decades by a range of thoughtful writers - Robert Graves, Marguerite Yourcenar, Mary Renault, for example - who are generally considered to have 'elevated' the historical novel to highbrow respectability.

Much less admired by critics - but certainly as widely, if not more widely, read - is the second form of historical fiction. This neither sees history as strange, nor attempts to make it stranger; on the contrary, it assumes a continuum of feeling and experience between the present and the past, addressing itself to what are apparently domestic fundamentals: courtship, marriage, familial pleasures and pains. The novels in this

³ Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London and New York, 1991), p. 255n.

⁴ Margaret Crosland, *Beyond the Lighthouse: English Women Novelists in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1981).

category tend to essentialise gender and other differences, even while sensitive to women's changing historical fortunes. Norah Lofts spoke for the form when, discussing her career in 1982, she claimed that "I write books about ordinary people some of whom happen to live in the past".⁵ Her sentiment is echoed in the very titles of many historical novels - Margaret Campbell Barnes' 1944 portrait of the Plantagenet family, for example: *Like Us, They Lived*.

In both of these manifestations of the historical genre homosexual men make substantial, sometimes surprising, appearances. In chapter 8 I shall be looking at the homoerotic historical fiction of writers such as Yourcenar, Renault, Bryher and Rosemary Sutcliff, and considering its place in the gay - and the lesbian - tradition. This chapter addresses the intriguing preoccupation with male homosexuality displayed by the women's historical romance. Both chapters examine fiction produced in the decades following the Second World War, when sexual debate was at a new peak, and changes were under way in the conceptualisation of homosexuality itself. As usual, sexological theory and historical fiction were, at this time, intimately linked; it is with the new sexology of the post-war period, therefore, that I want to begin.

'Now they call them complexes': the new sexology

I: American changes

The sexological shifts of the 1950s were both conceptual and geographical. By 1940 - partly as a consequence of the literal migration of academics and intellectuals from fascist European regimes to more liberal American shores - the United States had replaced Europe as the centre of international sexual debate.⁶ American commentators saw themselves fulfilling the promise of an older tradition, and claimed as their forefathers the nineteenth-century pioneers - Krafft-Ebing, Hirschfeld, Havelock Ellis. Their most significant debt, however, was to Freud; the debate between somatic and psychoanalytic

⁵ Quoted in Lesley Henderson, *Twentieth Century Romance and Historical Writers* (Chicago and London, 1990), p. 403.

⁶ See John C. Burnham's chapter on 'The Influence of Psychoanalysis upon American Culture', in his *Paths Into American Culture: Psychology, Medicine and Morals* (Philadelphia, 1988).

sexual paradigms already underway in the 1930s (as revealed, for example, by Goldsmith's *Christina of Sweden*) had, by the Second World War, run its course: psychoanalysis was established as a dominant conceptual model, informing American society on a variety of levels and, crucially, serving a range of sometimes conflicting interests.

Like Freud's work itself, the new psychoanalysis was both a register of and a stimulus to broader cultural currents. The discipline fostered, and was in turn lent prestige by, the optimism of the post-atomic period (which, as John Burnham points out, "endowed anyone who wore a lab coat with a special kind of authority"⁷); but, similarly, it was both shaped by and helped to fuel the reactionary political climate of the 1950s, appearing in a popularised form which was Freudian in only the broadest sense, and retained none of Freud's subtlety or caution. Scores of sexological studies published throughout the US in the '50s and '60s reiterated a normative model of sexuality and gender in which, as George Henry argued in his 1955 *All the Sexes*, the "greatest and most enduring satisfactions are obtained through the union of a masculine man and a feminine woman".⁸ Such a scheme branded the gender-crossing same-sex lover as doubly deviant. When measured against the ideal Oedipal standard - a paradigm which, like the ancient myth after which it was named, was understood to have a transhistorical, cross-cultural application - lesbians and gay men appeared unable, or perversely unwilling, to make the transition from narcissism and mother-fixation to heterosexual object-choice. Judd Marmor, writing in 1965, argued that "preferential homosexual behaviour is always associated with unconscious fears of heterosexual relationships", and identified "defects in [the] ego-adaptive capacity" of the same-sex lover;⁹ Frank S. Caprio, in *Female Homosexuality* (1954), points out that "many inverts do not wish to be changed. They prefer to think that their affliction is a congenital one so that they can use this as an excuse for not assuming the responsibilities associated with marriage and family life".¹⁰ Caprio's comment is a revealing one. Where early, biologicistic sexology had identified an

⁷ Burnham, *Paths*, p. 104.

⁸ George W. Henry, *All the Sexes: A Study of Masculinity and Femininity* (Toronto and New York, 1955), p. 566.

⁹ Introduction to Judd Marmor (ed.), *Sexual Inversion: the Multiple Roots of Homosexuality* (New York and London, 1965), pp. 12 and 19.

¹⁰ Frank S. Caprio, *Female Homosexuality: A Psychodynamic Study of Lesbianism* (London, 1957; first published New York, 1954), p. 300. Further references to Caprio's study will be included in the text.

inverted or even 'third' sex around which homosexual reform movements might rally, psychoanalysis posited inversion as an aberrant, potentially *curable* syndrome.¹¹ Where the founding fathers of sexology - Ulrichs, Ellis, Carpenter, Hirschfeld - had pioneered their models in response to deeply-felt homosexual identifications or sympathies (and often as part of a broader cultural millenarianism), psychoanalytic commentators of the post-war period established their perspective as normative in the identification, evaluation and treatment of deviant lovers.¹²

However, the labile, curable phenomenon which homosexuality became in psychoanalytic discourse was also a threatening, potentially *uncontrollable* one. As Gert Hekma notes, the most striking feature of psychoanalysis was its incorporation of "the shocking revelations of sexual psychopathology into the Oedipal system", its subsumation of "the sexual perversions under 'normal' sexual development".¹³ For an American culture anxious about domestic and national securities, the new sex and gender models were ones to which every individual was potentially inadequate. Studies like Caprio's warned their readers to be on their guard against the *spread* of sexual deviance - a spread in which they were all newly implicated. The nursery and the marriage bed were particular sites of anxiety: Caprio warns parents to provide a "healthy and congenial" home-life for their vulnerable infants, and to combat any signs of nascent homosexuality in the adolescent with a swift trip to a professional analyst; he advises husbands to attend to their wives' sexual pleasure, lest they find fulfilment in the embraces of more dextrous lesbian lovers. The concept of *latency* was an especially resonant one in this kind of alarmist discourse. Caprio finds latent lesbianism at the root of many marital 'problems': these include both female frigidity and promiscuity; excessive masturbation; and a

¹¹ Freud himself had regretfully discounted the somatic defence in his *Leonardo da Vinci* of 1910. In his analysis of Leonardo's homosexuality he favours an Oedipal interpretation - but adds the crucial qualification that "What is for practical reasons called homosexuality may arise from a whole variety of psychosexual inhibitory processes; the particular process we have singled out is perhaps only one among many, and is perhaps related to only one type of 'homosexuality'". *Leonardo da Vinci: A Memory of His Childhood*, trans. Alan Tyson (London, 1984), p. 49. It was precisely such flexibility that later, popularising commentators lacked.

¹² For an overview of American therapeutic theory, psychoanalytic and otherwise, see the 'Treatment' section of Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* (New York, 1992). For an early (1964) example of lesbian resistance to psychoanalytic models, see Judy Grahn's 'The Psychoanalysis of Edward the Dyke', reprinted in *The Work of a Common Woman* (London, 1985).

¹³ Gert Hekma, 'A History of Sexology: Social and historical aspects of sexuality', in Jan Bremmer (ed.), *From Sappho to de Sade: Moments in the History of Sexuality* (London and New York, 1989), pp. 173-193, p. 183.

preference for cunnilingus or the 'dominant' sexual position. In such a scenario, of course, women risk implicating themselves as deviants at every turn - at least, as long as they transgress wifely limits.¹⁴

The fears about potential or 'hidden' homosexuality which erupted with such force into the sexology of the '50s and '60s had received a substantial boost from the publication of Alfred Kinsey's report on male sexual behaviour in 1948. Kinsey and his team, impatient with the small-scale sexual surveys with which commentators had traditionally underpinned their theories, interviewed thousands of white American men, of all ages and classes, in an attempt to formulate meaningful statistics about the sex-life of the 'average' male. Their discovery that at least 37% of their subjects had experienced significant homosexual contact (and they would draw similarly startling conclusions about the frequency of lesbian behaviour, in a report of 1953), led them to the generous conclusion that homosexuality "is an expression of capacities that are basic in the human animal".¹⁵

To less liberal observers, however, Kinsey's findings simply made the need for a homosexual 'cure' more urgent than ever; their anxiety fed directly into Cold War paranoia, and impelled the McCarthy purges along homophobic routes. The emergence of psychoanalytic sexology rendered all the old signifiers redundant: no longer necessarily identifiable by his or her "indiscreet anatomy",¹⁶ the homosexual was understood to be capable of leading a double life, to be dangerously vulnerable to blackmail, a threat to national as well as domestic security. The kind of statistical analysis from which the Kinsey team had drawn their liberal conclusions was more often employed to fuel anti-homosexual hysteria: in May 1950, for example, the *New York Times* published claims that "3,500 perverts" were employed in government agencies. The figure was a guess, based, as was later revealed, on absurd reasoning;¹⁷ but the incident reveals the power of fears regarding homosexual *infiltration*. Such fears were fuelled by the new pulp

¹⁴ Donna Penn discusses the privileged role accorded the transgressive woman in post-war deviance discourse in 'The Meanings of Lesbianism in Post-War America', in *Gender and History*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Summer 1991, pp. 190-203.

¹⁵ Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy and Clyde E. Martin, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* (Philadelphia and London, 1948), p. 666.

¹⁶ The phrase is, of course, Foucault's: see *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth, 1984), p. 43.

¹⁷ See Katz, *Gay American History*, pp. 93-8, for a full account of the incident.

fictions which implied that urban and, more alarmingly, suburban America was riddled with secret homosexual networks and coteries. Lesbian and gay authors fired homophobic anxiety even as they satisfied heterosexual prurience and gay fantasy: Valerie Taylor's novels, for example, suggest that the women of Middle America engage in lesbian activity the moment their husbands' backs were turned; that lesbians are indeed indistinguishable from housewives and high-school girls.¹⁸

II: British developments

The influence of American opinion upon British sexual debate was considerable. American sexology (and pulp fiction) was published, discussed and often emulated in Britain (the Kinsey reports, for example, were issued simultaneously in Philadelphia and London; Marmor's *Sexual Inversion* and Caprio's *Female Homosexuality* both found British publishers); the '50s and '60s saw homosexuality reconstructed as a pressing British social 'problem', and witnessed a corresponding explosion in homosexual commentary. As in the US, the dominant new sexological discourse was broadly psychoanalytic, characterising the homosexual as delayed at an immature or imperfect stage of psychosexual development. On the whole, however, British commentary was less alarmist than its American counterpart. Where American sexologists fostered anxiety about the spread of homosexuality and - incidentally advancing the interests of their own psycho-industry - advocated corrective therapy and 'cure', British writers sought to master the homosexual *minority*: compiled guides to the new 'gay' subculture, and glossaries to the 'homosexual vernacular'.¹⁹

¹⁸ See, for example, *Journey to Fulfilment* (1964) and *Return to Lesbos* (1963). The paradox of the 1950s, of course, was that, in both Britain and the US, the ascendancy of reactionary politics was accompanied by a consolidation of lesbian and gay cultures, and the growth of civil rights and law-reform movements. See Angela Weir and Elizabeth Wilson, 'The Greyhound Bus Station in the Evolution of Lesbian Popular Culture', in Sally Munt (ed.), *New Lesbian Criticism: Literary and Cultural Readings* (Hemel Hempstead, 1992), pp. 95-113. Weir and Wilson call for a new acknowledgement of '50s radicalism.

¹⁹ Gordon Westwood [pseud. Michael Schofield] includes a guide to the homosexual vernacular in an appendix to *A Minority: A Report on the Life of the Male Homosexual in Great Britain* (London, 1960). Some American commentators had attempted similar glossaries; see especially 'The Language of Homosexuality', the thirty-page appendix to George Henry's *Sex Variants: a Study of Homosexual Patterns* (New York, 1941).

The disparity between American and British commentaries is, perhaps, reflected in their titles; while publications in the US - *The Homosexual Explosion*, *Strangers in Our Midst*, *Someone You May Know* - hint at the possibly alarming *contiguity* between homosexuality and the 'norm', British studies - *Odd Man Out*, *They Stand Apart*, *A Minority* - testify to an essential homosexual *difference*.²⁰ Such volumes, while not quite homosexual apologies, frequently solicited public tolerance for the homosexual condition, and sometimes advocated legal changes. As with nineteenth-century commentary, there was often no clear line between homosexual and sexological interests.²¹ Traditionalists saw in psychoanalysis a soft modern substitute for moral and religious discourses: "In my youth they used to call things of this sort sin", fumed Lord Ammon at a House of Lords debate on homosexual offences in 1954; "now they call them complexes".²² Four years later, law reform lobbyists would approve of *Live and Let Live* by sex commentator Eustace Chessser (author of *Odd Man Out*) to the point of sending copies to MPs debating the Wolfenden proposals.²³

It was in reform defence, indeed, that the differences between British and American commentary were perhaps most marked. While traditionalists voiced their fears about the homosexual problem in terms which echoed those invasion narratives underpinning American alarmism²⁴ - and while there may have been a McCarthy-style purge of homosexuals from government and influential positions in the early 1950s²⁵ - liberal British commentators responded to broader political anxieties not with paranoia, but by invoking the democratic national self-image. Informing the Wolfenden

²⁰ Roger Blake, *The Homosexual Explosion* (1959); Alfred A. Gross, *Strangers in Our Midst: Problems of the Homosexual in American Society* (1962); William Konraad, *Someone You May Know: A Heterosexual Looks at Homosexuality* (1965). Eustace Chessser, *Odd Man Out: Homosexuality in Men and Women* (1959); J. Tudor Rees and Harley V. Usill (eds.), *They Stand Apart: A Critical Survey of the Problems of Homosexuality* (1955); Westwood, *A Minority*.

²¹ Nor are the all of the British titles as negative as they appear. 'They Stand Apart', for example, echoes Nietzsche: "Ye lonely ones of today, ye who stand apart, ye shall one day be a people; from you who have chosen yourselves a chosen people shall arise, and from it beyond man": quoted by William Paine (interestingly enough) in *Shop Slavery and Emancipation: A Revolutionary Appeal to the Educated Young Men of the Middle Class* (London, 1912), p. 112.

²² Quoted in Rees and Usill, *They Stand Apart* (London, 1955), p. 204.

²³ Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out* (London, 1990), p. 169.

²⁴ "Wherever I go I find the same ugly story", complained Mr Justice Stables at the Buckinghamshire Assizes in 1955. "If this evil is allowed to spread, it will corrupt the men of the nation." Quoted in Rees and Usill, *They Stand Apart*, p. vii.

²⁵ See Weeks, *Coming Out* pp. 159-61.

recommendation for partial decriminalisation of homosexuality was the conviction that two adult men should be able to behave, in private, as they liked, without the threat of state intervention. This idea was reiterated by homosexuals in their own defence. "How *could* one be arrested in the small hours on such trumpery bits of accusation", wrote Rupert Croft-Cooke in his autobiography *The Verdict of You All* (1955), "[...] then kept in a lock-up over the weekend, prevented from seeing a solicitor, have one's house ransacked without authority and find oneself committed, at quite fearful expense, to face trial? Was England no better in such matters than the totalitarian states?"²⁶ Peter Wildeblood was similarly disillusioned by his own experiences of arrest and imprisonment: "I did not believe that such things could happen in England," he wrote in *Against the Law* (1955), "until they happened to me".²⁷

Such appeals to the British sense of fair play were often effective ones (witness the public indignation on Wildeblood's behalf as irregularities in the police handling of the case became increasingly apparent), but the implications of the broader homosexual apology in which they played a role were far from radical. Seeking recognition of their status as responsible citizens inevitably involved many homosexuals in a collusion with, rather than a dismantling of, dominant moral standards. Wildeblood's autobiography, for example, asks for "tolerance", not for all homosexuals - not for "the corrupters of youth", nor even for "the effeminate creatures who love to make an exhibition of themselves" - but for those discreet and sober homosexuals who do their best "to look like everyone else" and lead their lives according to admirable "principles" (13). In liberal statements of all varieties the burden of rectitude was placed firmly upon homosexuals themselves.

Similarly, the main drawback of the new British preoccupation with the homosexual minority was its tendency to characterise lesbians and gay men as literally pathetic, doomed to estrangement from romantic and familial pleasures - "odd" in terms both of queerness and of *surplus* - and continually at war with their own deviant natures. "Much can be done", wrote Kenneth Walker in his Introduction to Eustache Chessser's *Odd Man Out* (1959), "to help that unfortunate section of society which is cut off from the fuller life of the community, and which is forced to carry alone and unaided an

²⁶ Rupert Croft-Cooke, *The Verdict of You All* (London, 1955), p. 26.

²⁷ Peter Wildeblood, *Against the Law* (Harmondsworth, 1957), p. 54. Further references will be included in the text.

intolerable burden of fear, guilt and shame."²⁸ Many homosexuals described their oppression in similar terms. "This is the story of someone who is a homosexual and an alcoholic," begins Robert Hutton's 1958 *Of Those Alone*, "but it is not claimed that the writer is the average of either of these misfits; only that this is what can happen to someone who has to live his life under both of these disabilities."²⁹ A correspondent of Montgomery Hyde spoke of being "cursed with the homosexual trait";³⁰ Wildeblood writes of being "no more proud of my condition than I would be of having a glass eye or a hare-lip" (8). Homosexuals, situated once by millenarian discourse in the vanguard of a hopeful new society, were reconstructed unequivocally by post-war sexual commentary as shadowy lovers and 'sad young men'.³¹

All of these currents in post-war culture - the new dominance of psychoanalysis, the reconstruction of homosexuality as an urgent social problem, the prevalence of the 'sad young man' stereotype - had an impact on the historical fiction of the period. Indeed, under the weight of these new models, the very shape of the homosexual past, and the identity of its particular icons, was transformed. Though Mary Renault fostered older paiderastic interests with her series of novels set in ancient Greece, her particular brand of homosexual Hellenism, as we shall see, was not uninfluenced by mid-century sexological changes; more conspicuous participants in post-war sexual debate, however, were the popular historical novels of the '50s and early '60s I shall be examining in this chapter: Anya Seton's *Katherine* (1954), Norah Lofts' *The Lute-player* (1951) and Margaret Campbell Barnes' *Isabel the Fair* (1957). Where Renault, like Symonds and Wilde before her, looked to history for homosexual states - nations or communities in which same-sex desire was both celebrated and routine - the writers of these novels found in the past only the homosexual 'state' or *condition* as modern sexology had recently defined it. Their interests were, moreover, primarily romantic; like so many commentators of the period, they measured the male homosexual against a heterosexual romantic standard to which he was bound to prove inadequate.

²⁸ Chesser, *Odd Man Out* (London, 1959), p. 8.

²⁹ Robert Hutton, 'Author's Note' to *Of Those Alone* (London, 1958), p. 7.

³⁰ Quoted in Stephen Jeffrey-Poulter, *Peers, Queers and Commons: The struggle for gay law reform from 1950 to the present* (London and New York, 1991), p. 42.

³¹ For more on the prevalence - and the complexity - of 'sad young man' stereotyping, see Richard Dyer's 'Coming out as going in: the image of the homosexual as a sad young man', in his *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* (London and New York, 1993), pp. 73-92.

The historical romance

The construction of the homosexual as a lonely or pathetic individual, estranged from familial and romantic pleasures, was reinforced by changes in the conceptualisation of romance itself. As Alison Light points out, the "meanings of romance and of 'romantic' as terms of literary description became more narrowly specialised between the wars, coming to signify only those love-stories, aimed ostensibly at a wholly female readership, which deal primarily with the trials and tribulations of heterosexual desire, and end happily in marriage".³² By the 1950s, with the rise of mass-market paperback publishing (both Mills & Boon and Harlequin, its Canadian equivalent, limited their output exclusively to romance titles in this decade), the literary romance had acquired the specific, escapist reputation it enjoys today, and the *historical* romance had become infused with a new excitement over female domestic detail.³³ Women historical romancers attempted to fill in the female spaces in both history and traditional historiography - setting their novels in kitchens and parlours, solars and garde-robes, rather than campaign tents or debating chambers, piecing together fragments of women's daily lives from parish registers and town archives. We should not underestimate the feminist significance of their collective project. Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* had called for "a mass of information" on "the life of the average Elizabethan woman": "at what age did she marry; how many children had she as a rule; what was her house like, had she a room to herself; did she do the cooking; would she be likely to have a servant?".³⁴ Novelists and historians alike attempted to correct historiography's partial vision.

The historical romance was pressed into its post-war shape by a variety of cultural forces - Light, for example, notes the influence of theories of relativity upon the new dramatisation of the past as "local, familiar and interior".³⁵ But, like sexology - and like

³² Light, *Forever England*, p. 160.

³³ I am using 'historical romance' here - as elsewhere in the thesis - in a very specific, literal sense, meaning those novels in which the historical narrative is structured around a more basic romantic plot. The traditional distinction (endorsed by John Raymond in his *New Statesman* article) between the historical romance and the "historical novel proper", which "must always aim at portraying a whole type of society" (445), has only a limited application - and breaks down totally in the face of complex, epic but nevertheless *romantic* novels like Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* and Anya Seton's *Katherine*.

³⁴ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London, 1977), p. 44.

³⁵ Light, *Forever England*, p. 188.

historiography itself ('psychohistory' was, for many commentators in the 1950s, an exciting new discipline³⁶) - the genre owed a considerable debt to psychoanalysis. Novelists and biographers of all kinds began to take new liberties with their subjects after the dissemination of psychoanalytic theory; but for the female historical novelist in particular, psychoanalysis - which, like her, attempted to look beneath or beyond established narrative, to re-tell events exposing hitherto hidden historical agencies - was an important model. Typically, the romance recovers the individual dependencies and antipathies underlying historical change - primarily, the desires binding the great men of history to their less celebrated wives and mistresses. Some romances even replicate the psychoanalytic process itself. In Anya Seton's *Katherine*, for example, the heroine heals her troubled lover John of Gaunt by exposing the unconscious fears - legacy of a traumatic childhood - which have been driving him to political and domestic fury: "'No dear,' she said. 'To hit me'll do no good. All these last months have you not been striking out, and has it eased you? You know that it hasn't. I believe that to *speak out* might ease you. I love you, John, trust me'".³⁷ Such scenes recuperate women as the hidden administrators of men's more visible passions; they also, of course, in classic romance style, allow women ultimate mastery over male aggression.³⁸

In the series of family dramas to which the historical romance reduces the past, however, normative models of sex and gender are invariably endorsed, and the homosexual is once again cast as a deviant. Homosexual men are not, as we might expect, simply absent from romantic narratives; instead they turn up with quite surprising regularity, haunting the peripheries of the heterosexual plot, and even, sometimes, dominating it. *Katherine*, for example, sports two homosexual characters: Nirac de Bayonne, John of Gaunt's devoted Gascon servant, who belongs "to that type of man who [has] but tepid interest in the love of women" (143), and the girlish Richard II, John's nephew, a "too delicately bred Plantagenet flower" (507). Seton's depiction of both invokes modern homosexual stereotypes. Nirac is temperamental and unpredictable; in

³⁶ See, for example, William L. Langer, 'The Next Assignment', in *The American Historical Review*, LXIII (2) (January 1958), pp. 283-304.

³⁷ Anya Seton, *Katherine* (London, 1954), p. 336. Further references will be included in the text.

³⁸ See Tania Modleski, *Loving With a Vengeance: Mass-produced Fantasies for Women* (London and New York, 1982), p. 45. Modleski finds a considerable *revenge* factor in the romance formula in which the hero, hostile or even violent throughout the course of the novel, is revealed in the denouement to have been obsessed with and weakened by love for the heroine all along.

England Katherine finds him "amusing", but in his native France he appears to her "suddenly sinister and secret, like the twilit town that turned blank walls to the street and hid its true life from passers-by" (226). Richard, too, is "undisciplined, childish, vengeful - and dangerous" (531); with the authority of kingship, he is able to indulge his caprices on an outrageous scale, surrounding himself with an effeminate retinue - "a giggling, mincing group of young men in skintight hose that showed their thighs, and more, and who wore velvet shoes with points a half yard long" (506) - and flaunting his intimacy with one particular "favourite", the scheming Robert de Vere.

At de Vere's faultlessly handsome face, Katherine gazed with revulsion. [...] Ay, there was perversion of all sorts dwelling behind those tinted beardless cheeks, the gold-powdered curls, the tall slender body that bore itself so haughtily in violet brocade which gave forth a wave of scent as he passed. (506)

The historical romance's delight in sartorial detail does not extend to the costumes of its male heroes; when narratives linger over men's finery, it is with humour, or distaste, and frequently - as here - with heavy homosexual implication.³⁹

Seton's Richard recalls Philippe d'Orléans, the homosexual French prince wedded to Minette - with disastrous results - in Margaret Irwin's *Royal Flush* (1932); he, too, is attended by a "crowd of pretty young men" who 'prance', 'gush' and 'gesticulate'.⁴⁰ Such novels offer the homosexual man - along with figures like the boorish first husband, the importuning male and the female rival - as a perennial feature of the romantic landscape which must be negotiated by the questing heroine on her journey towards union with a masculine ideal. Inevitably, this hardy homosexual obstacle has been continually reconstructed according to dominant sexual models. The most significant difference between Irwin's and Seton's settings is, perhaps, geographical. That the foreign dandy Philippe was a homosexual may have come as no surprise to British readers: implicit in Irwin's retelling of Minette's tragedy is a crucial distinction between the perverse French court of Louis XIV and the wholesome English one of the philandering Charles II.

³⁹ Striking exceptions to this rule are, of course, the novels of Georgette Heyer. The eighteenth-century dandies and Regency bucks who populate her period fictions are obsessed with the cut of their coats and the fall of their Mechlin cravates; they wear heels, patches and powdered wigs - and even, when necessary, cross-dress (see, for example, *The Masqueraders* [1928]).

⁴⁰ Margaret Irwin, *Royal Flush: the Story of Minette* (London, 1971; first published 1932), p. 140.

Katherine, on the other hand, enacts the post-war broadening of the national self-image to include homosexual elements in its own royal history.⁴¹ Compounding this image, as we shall see, were *The Lute-player* and *Isabel the Fair* - historical novels about two of England's most memorable homosexual kings, Richard the Lionheart and Edward II.

'Poet, troubadour, pervert': the post-war Richard I

Like Queen Christina in the 1930s, Richard I emerged from the popular historiography of the post-war period with a sexual reputation redefined in the light of recent sexological shifts. Early twentieth-century biographies of the King had made only brief and oblique references to the sodomitical sins for which he allegedly did public penance at Messina in 1190. Kate Norgate, for example, writing in 1924, mentions the "vice" or "iniquity" of which Richard was guilty - but crucially neglects to name it.⁴² Clennell Wilkinson, in his *Coeur de Lion* (1933), tells us only that the King "blurted out the kind of intimate confession which [...] most men would blush to relate".⁴³ By the late 1940s, however, Richard's 'vice' - recast as an 'inclination' - was being acknowledged by a range of commentators - not just sexologists, who had always been sensitive to the erotic quirks of British monarchs, but historians, biographers and, as we shall see, historical novelists.

Once established, the King's sexual identity - again, like Christina's - took its colouring from the particular homosexual narrative in which it was brought into play. "The evidence is clear", wrote John Harvey in his study of *The Plantagenets* (1948), "that Richard, like many other warriors and also some most unwarlike men, was the victim of homosexuality."⁴⁴ "Victim" was, of course, a crucial term in the homosexual vocabulary

⁴¹ The same period witnessed a new, popular acknowledgement of Byron's homosexual reputation (see Louis Crompton, *Byron and Greek Love* [London, 1985]), and of Shakespeare's. Anthony Burgess' *Nothing Like the Sun: A Story of Shakespeare's Love-Life* (1964) depicts the Bard's bisexual affairs with the Mr W.H. and the Dark Lady of the sonnets; Havelock Ellis had considered it impolitic to include Shakespeare in the homosexual canon he drew up for *Sexual Inversion* in 1897. For more on post-war versions of Shakespeare - which reconstructed him and his work in line with contemporary homosexual stereotypes - see Simon Shepherd, 'Shakespeare's private drawer: Shakespeare and homosexuality', in Graham Holderness (ed.), *The Shakespeare Myth* (Manchester, 1988), pp. 96-110.

⁴² Kate Norgate, *Richard the Lion Heart* (London, 1924), p. 134.

⁴³ Clennell Wilkinson, *Coeur de Lion* (London, 1933), p. 73.

⁴⁴ John Harvey, *The Plantagenets 1154-1485* (London, 1948), p. 33. Further references will be included in the text.

of the post-war period, much as words like "shame" and "morbid" had punctuated even self-identified homosexual discourse at the turn of the century.⁴⁵ Harvey's interests are actually those of the liberal homosexual apologist; like so many of the novels and histories we have examined in previous chapters, his biography plunges without warning into the most contemporary of sexual arguments - here, the law-reform debate. The "true history of 'unnatural' vice", he writes,

does deserve serious consideration, the more so as it is in recent England the subject of intense persecution and of penalties so ferocious as to seem almost incredible. [...Homosexuality is] a profound psychological problem which demands radically new treatment; it can never be solved by such indefensible cruelty as the martyrdom of Oscar Wilde and the scores (or is it hundreds?) of his fellow sufferers. It is easy to class the unpopular and unsuccessful, such as Edward II and James I, as 'degenerates', but may not a change of heart be induced by breaking the conspiracy of silence surrounding the popular hero Richard? (33-4)

Harvey's optimism - his idea that, at the revelation that a homosexual might be decent as well as degenerate, public and juridical homophobia might be instantly disarmed - proved to be sadly misplaced. His argument was similar to Wildeblood's; but it would be more than a decade after the publication of the homosexual prison narratives of the '50s before even partial decriminalisation was achieved. By then, far from redirecting dominant discourse, Richard's example had been absorbed and redefined by it.

Where Harvey had sought to retain the homosexual Richard in his traditional heroic pose, Alfred Duggan's 1957 history of the Angevin family, *Devil's Brood*, recasts the King as a "'mother's boy' - of a special kind".⁴⁶ Duggan was a prolific producer of historical fiction and biography, and, like many historiographers of the period, preoccupied with the historical *family* (his 1960 novel about the homosexual Roman Emperor Elagabalus is ironically entitled *Family Favourites*; *Devil's Brood* recalls Margaret Campbell Barnes' 1945 portrait of the Angevins, *Passionate Brood*⁴⁷). Like the psychoanalytic sexologist or psycho-historian, Duggan rewrites his subject's

⁴⁵ *Victim*, starring a courageous Dirk Bogarde, was made in 1961, "the archetypal liberal 'pity' film of the period" (Weeks, *Coming Out*, p. 174). The screenplay was subsequently novelised by William Drummond.

⁴⁶ Alfred Duggan, *Devil's Brood: The Angevin Family* (London, 1957), p. 66. Further references will be included in the text.

⁴⁷ *The Passionate Brood* was in fact the American reissue (1945) of *Like Us, They Lived*.

homosexual biography according to the Oedipal master-narrative. That there are 'special kinds' of mothers' boys only reveals the flexibility of the Oedipal paradigm in popular psychoanalysis: Richard - clearly no pansy - "was tough and ruthless and energetic, like his mother. In matters of sex he was neutral, because in these matters he could not follow her example" (66). Richard is prevented from emulating his mother's masculine object-choice only by his conscience, which is that of "a good Christian and a good knight"; certainly, however, "he liked handsome young men, especially the trouvères of north France; in spite of the wide difference in rank these artists were his constant companions" (65). Like Goldsmith's version of Queen Christina, Duggan's portrait claims psychoanalytic authority but draws on a range of models: that aristocratic homosexuals had a predilection for young working men was a point on which the prosecuting counsel of Peter Wildeblood's well-publicised trial had particularly insisted.⁴⁸

The trouvères with whom, in Duggan's biography, Richard is supposed to have eased his unfulfillable homosexual urges also recall the figure of Blondel, the troubadour who, according to legend, sang before all the gaols of Germany until he found the dungeon in which the King, captured by Leopold of Austria, lay imprisoned. The romance of the legend has appealed to poets and novelists since its inception in the fourteenth century; with the redefinition of Richard's biography that took place in the post-war period, however, the King's relationship with his faithful troubadour became newly available for homoerotic interpretation, and - in heterosexual commentary, at least - newly incompatible with romantic models. Though Gore Vidal, in *A Search For the King* (1950), was able to recuperate Blondel's quest as a fantastic picaresque for a specifically American homoerotic tradition,⁴⁹ Norah Lofts, in her contemporaneous *The Lute-player*, re-presented Richard's story quite literally as an *anti*-romance.

⁴⁸ "It is a feature, is it not," Wildeblood was pressed, "that inverts or perverts seek their love associates in a different walk of life than their own?" (*Against the Law*, p. 80). As in the Wilde trial, the alliances uncovered by the prosecution were scandalous because they transgressed class as well as sexual boundaries.

⁴⁹ Gore Vidal, *A Search for the King* (New York, 1950). In Vidal's novel Blondel's journey is across an enchanted landscape haunted by fraternities of outlaws - a romance in the classic sense, in which men uncomplicatedly commune and women are the idealised objects of courtly love rituals to whom real females - domestic, demanding, predatory - are always inadequate. (For more on the homoerotics of the traditional romance, see chapter 5 of Wayne Koestenbaum's *Double Talk* [New York and London, 1989].) Blondel has fleeting heterosexual encounters; but the novel ends on a reaffirmation of his more lasting bond with the charismatic Richard. *A Search for the King* remained unpublished in the UK until 1979.

Romance writers such as Lofts, who turn for inspiration to real historical figures and events, face a problem unknown to those whose plots are pure invention: history does not always - or even usually - contain happy endings. Where the strict, utopian formula developed by the romance genre in its recent, mass market form follows a woman from sexual eligibility to marriage, history testifies to the power and variety of all the *post-nuptial* traumas: disappointment and disenchantment; infidelity, domestic violence and estrangement; separation and death. Though Lofts enjoys the reputation of romancer along with authors like Georgette Heyer and Victoria Holt, her historical novels tend to expose the breakdown or inadequacy of the romantic model in the face of human - especially, female - experience. Like many memorable genre fictions, they test or even interrogate their own generic conventions. Informing *The Lute-player*, in particular, is a sensitivity to the *partiality* of romance, an acknowledgement that women have access to the romantic paradigm only on men's terms. The novel's primary narrator is the fictional Anna Apieta, half-sister to Berengaria, Richard's French wife. Crippled from birth because her mother, a king's mistress, wore an iron girdle to conceal her inconvenient pregnancy, Anna is freed from the rewards and the demands of the male gaze: relegated beyond consideration as a romantic object, she is at liberty to travel alone, to converse on equal terms with men, and to observe unnoticed. Her interior commentary runs parallel to the larger narrative of Richard's involvement in the ill-fated Third Crusade, but intersects with it at crucial points. It is her subtle manipulations and well-timed suggestions that send envoys on vital journeys, prompt slower characters to radical deeds: "'You and I, my lady,'" Blondel tells her near the end of the novel, "'though we do not figure in the chronicles, we are - what is the term? - mythical figures! Between us we ruined the Third Crusade!'"⁵⁰

Lofts' concern in *The Lute-player* is, indeed, to uncover hidden historical agents. The novel - typically, for Lofts - is divided between multiple narrators: Anna; Blondel, who gives his own account of the Crusade at her suggestion; and Eleanor of Aquitaine, Richard's mother. Impelling the narrative as a whole are three unfulfilled romances. Anna, secretly, loves Blondel. He - initially with all the ardour of the courtly lover, ultimately with disillusionment and despair - loves the beautiful Berengaria. Berengaria

⁵⁰ Norah Lofts, *The Lute-player* (London, 1951), p. 490. Further references will be included in the text. All subsequent editions of Lofts' novel have the slightly different title *The Lute Player*.

loves Richard; and though she succeeds in becoming his wife - as, with Anna's help, she plots and strives to do throughout the first half of the novel - her passion is never returned. For Richard is a homosexual, and his 'disability', like Anna's, removes him from heterosexual engagement. "I have been an ill husband to you, my lady..." he apologises to Berengaria on his deathbed, "and you so beautiful and kind. But God makes us, you know... and He did not make me... a lover of women... it was not my choice..." (495-6). Earlier biographies, as we've seen, had been preoccupied with Richard's public confession of 1190; in this scene, Lofts transports the King's homosexual admission to the domestic setting in which post-war sexology was insisting it had its greatest significance.

Richard's final, faltering apology is also his only sexual testimony. His homosexuality functions in *The Lute-player* as the privileged source of narrative intrigue; but from Lofts' polyphonic text the King's own voice is strikingly, and significantly, absent. Instead, his secret is disclosed to the reader in hints and gestures, and to individual characters in moments of unforeseen revelation. It forms the tantalising subtext, for example, to the scene in which he discusses with his mother his protracted engagement to the Princess Alys.

'Have you ever wondered *why* whenever the matter of my marriage to Alys has been brought up, some reason, always a fresh one, has been found for the postponement? Answer that honestly, Mother.' I answered him honestly.

'Many times - with each postponement. At first I blamed you - not too hardly, Richard; you are young and many temptations, I am sure, come your way [...]. More lately, I must admit, I have begun to cherish a suspicion.'

'Yes?' he said, looking at me closely, with caution. (141)

Alys, it is revealed, is having an affair with Richard's father; but the readerly expectations raised and frustrated in this scene are satisfied later, when Eleanor catches her son unawares as he watches Blondel sing:

I stood there, waiting for the verse to end and thinking these oddly assorted thoughts. Then it happened.

Richard's hand, lean and brown, cupped for caressing, reached out until it almost touched the back of that silver-gilt head; it hesitated, hovered and fell away, as Eve's hand must have fallen away once, twice, before it closed at last about the deadly apple.

And I looked into Richard's face and saw there what is perhaps the most shocking, most humiliating thing any woman - let alone a mother - can see on any man's face: naked, hungry, lustful desire directed at another man. [...]

The full weight of my understanding and my knowledge fell on me like the lead that falls on the wretch condemned to *Peine Fort et Dure*; and I stood there, within arm's reach of Richard, so shocked and stunned that if he had looked up and seen me I could not have spoken to him. If a lion had come rampaging through the tent I could not have stepped out of its path.

Alys, I thought... and the long delay.... Berengaria... and the absence even of curiosity. It all fitted. (227-8)

The homosexual revelation which resolves narrative tensions was, I would suggest, a distinctly post-war literary innovation, unthinkable outside of a discourse in which the homosexual was physically indistinguishable, but psychically distinct, from other, 'normal', men. As James Levin points out, it was in the early '50s that authors first began to use homosexual twists as complicating devices in the plots of mystery novels.⁵¹ *The Lute-player* had a place therefore in a new genre of homosexual representation along with Edward Ronns' *The State Department Murders* (1950) and Mickey Spillane's *Vengeance is Mine* (1950), both of which make crucial play with sexual revelation. It was similarly pressed by paperback marketing into a sensational, sex-exposé mould: "An extraordinary novel", promises the 1964 Bantam edition, "about the strange and secret life of one of history's great heroes".

Thanks to *The Lute-player*'s complicated structure, Richard's secret continues to generate narrative intrigue even after his unwitting self-betrayal before his mother. Despite another deathbed confession - this one (by the King's lover, Raife de Clermont) terminated at the crucial moment - Blondel remains innocent of the King's sexual designs until, in an unrepresented scene near the end of his account of the Third Crusade, Richard attempts to seduce him. Then, his feelings of horror and embarrassment match those of Eleanor; they are experienced again, later, by Anna, when she and Berengaria discuss Richard's "perversion" together for the first time:

A sick feeling moved in my stomach and rose to my throat. It was one thing to accept a situation of this sort, to gobble it up as it were in a vague general interest in the curious ways of the world; but it was another to sit there and look at the beautiful woman whom any man might have loved and admit, acknowledge that a handsome young virile man had turned from her embrace to that of a man. (398)

In other words, the novel repeatedly revisits the moment of homosexual revelation, and

⁵¹ James Levin, *The Gay Novel in America* (New York and London, 1991), p. 96.

of horrified heterosexual recoil. Richard's homosexuality, an absence in the text, is represented as an *effect*, endowed with meaning only by the figures - mother, comrade, wife - upon whom it impinges.

Lofts' portrait of a homosexual Richard was an influential one.⁵² As Barnes' *Isabel the Fair* reveals, however, the anti-romance in which she established him as privileged agent could be replayed with another, more notorious, royal protagonist: Edward II, the hapless English king whose extravagant homosexual affections drove his wife, Isabel of France, to adultery and treason, and provoked his outraged subjects to insurrection and murder.

Edward II and *Isabel the Fair*

Like Lofts, Margaret Campbell Barnes seems to have had a particular fascination with unhappy romances: *My Lady of Cleves* (1946) and *Brief Gaudy Hour* (1949), for example, tell the stories of Anne of Cleves and Anne Boleyn, two of the ill-fated wives of Henry VIII. *Isabel the Fair* depicts another doomed marriage; opening rather than closing with a royal wedding, it traces the disappointment of its heroine's - and its reader's - romantic expectations in their collision with Edward's substantial homosexual reputation:

⁵² In Pamela Bennetts' *Richard and the Knights of God* (London, 1970), for example, the King - "poet, troubadour, pervert", as the marketing blurb describes him - is once again the obstacle to women's erotic satisfaction. Here Berengaria longs for a child; as in *The Lute-player*, however, Richard is unable to oblige, and can only apologise: "It is true enough [...] that I cannot give you what you seek and that which is your right as a woman, and for this I would ask your forgiveness" (p. 230). Berengaria is unconsolated; the King himself remains isolated, "a creature set apart" (p. 232). Also relevant here is Jay Williams' *Tomorrow's Fire* (London, 1965). Like *The Lute-player*, *Tomorrow's Fire* underpins its account of the Third Crusade with a homosexual secret - not, this time, the King's, but that of his troubadour companion, the fictional Denys de Courtebarbe. The anxieties enacted in this novel are those post-Kinsey ones about the possibly slippery distinction between the homosexual and the man in the street: Denys is literally seduced into the King's service but, unlike Lofts' Blondel, finds a "shameful pleasure" in accepting his "caresses and endearments" (p. 298). This capacity for deviant pleasure obstructs his access to the heterosexual romantic dyad: where Vidal had recast Richard's troubadour as a picaresque homoerotic icon, Williams' Denys is chronically inconstant, eternally in pursuit of the idealised female of the courtly love paradigm, but unable to settle down with a real woman. More thoroughly than Seton's *Katherine*, the novel is a simulacrum of the psychoanalytic process, through which the hero's journey is an essentially 'healing' one. Denys' narrative is periodically disrupted by fragmentary memories of a repressed childhood trauma; confronting this at last, he is able to expunge his homosexual desires. He frees himself from the King's service, and leaves the Crusade with a female lover, Leila, to whom he is now able wholeheartedly to commit himself. Richard is left on the battlefield, excluded from romantic pleasures but - as homosexuals were advised to by a range of commentators in the early '60s - soldiering on.

Though Isabel had been betrothed to him since she was a child of seven, this was the first time she had ever set eyes on him; and Heaven be praised, he looked the kind of husband she had always longed for! His easy charm would fulfil the secret dreams of any romantically-minded girl. Though whether that was a blessing to be entirely thankful for she was not, on second thoughts, entirely sure.

'Tell me quickly what rumours you have heard,' she whispered, catching at the sleeve of a worldly-wise countess who had but recently returned from England.

'Rumours?' The Countess looked both embarrassed and alarmed, so that Isabel's heart sank.

'I am not a child,' she insisted, her voice sharp as it was apt to be in moments of anxiety. 'I realize that with so handsome a bachelor king there must have been other women.'

'Other women?' The Countess' brows shot up, her reply came more glibly. 'Oh no, Madam. I was over there in the Dowager-Queen Marguerite's suite for months, and never heard of any. I do assure your Grace that there will be no need for unhappiness on that score.'⁵³

Travelling to England and observing her husband's immoderate affection for his handsome friend, Piers Gaveston, Isabel does not remain ingenuous for long. Edward and Gaveston's affair is the scandal of the English court, the more so because the King's attentions to his Regent disrupt crucial conventions: he gives him a jewelled clasp that was part of Isabel's dowry, and meant for her first-born son; he ennobles him with a title, 'Earl of Cornwall', reserved for members of the royal house. But he also frustrates more basic privileges, spending his days - and his nights - with Gaveston, so that Isabel must climb "shivering into her empty marriage bed to cry into her pillow like a broken-hearted child" (36). When he does visit Isabel's chamber, he is sexually undemanding - "kind and gentle" (52); she, still in pursuit of the romantic ideal, longs for a more virile lover:

why, why could he not *order* her to come? Take her because she was his? [...] 'It is high-spirited jades like me who need a master. Someone who can dominate me, afford to smile while I spit out my fury, then bend my will to his and take me on equal terms of desire, holding me his by natural right against the world. And until God gives me such a man must I go hungry?' (120)

Fortunately for Isabel, God, or Barnes, does provide her with such a man, in the shape of the Welsh border lord, Roger Mortimer. When Isabel and Mortimer meet, they experience an instant rapport: "'like calls to like'", as he "audaciously" puts it (129). Edward - sensitive, fashionable, urbane - is 'like' Isabel - but evidently not in the right

⁵³ Margaret Campbell Barnes, *Isabel the Fair* (London, 1957), p. 11. Further references will be included in the text.

way. What she enjoys with Mortimer is the complementary 'like'ness of the heterosexual dyad: "'Consent to be my partner in all things,'" he smoulders, "'as nature intended'" (184). Though she can converse at length with the sympathetic Edward, she communicates with Mortimer on the more essential, non-verbal level of romantic exchange. Most importantly of all, their passion transcends (her) rank: "He spoke as though he were her equal. As no man without royal blood had ever dared to do before" (172). Where kingship is understood to distance men irrecoverably from their more ordinary fellows - which perhaps explains the frequency with which it is employed in the literature of this period as a homosexual trope⁵⁴ - queenship is offered by the historical romance as a female privilege which may nevertheless be broached by the adventurous male lover.

Emboldened by her affair with Mortimer, Isabel is more contemptuous than ever of her husband's condition - "'this taint'", as he apologetically terms it, "'which I seem to have been born with'" (199). But she can also, now, afford to be magnanimous.

'What do men like you expect of their wives?' She saw that he was genuinely shaken by her savagery and liked him better in that pathetic moment [...] 'It is not I, or my body, that you really want,' she went on a little impatiently, as though explaining something to a backward child. 'Do you not see that it is some remembered state of life - a return to childhood security - which weak people crave - oblivion from your own self-contempt, that you are seeking?' (199)

The King's *weakness* is something upon which the novel particularly insists. Edward is "incapable" and "insufficient" (113), an "incapable pervert" (266); at the crucial Battle of Bannockburn he makes a cowardly early retreat, leaving his men to be slaughtered. His inadequacy throws Mortimer's virility into greater relief, but it also spurs Isabel herself to action. Marguerite, the King's stepmother, suggests that her romantic expectations are too high: "'My dear, you know that we women are only pawns in this game of politics'" (49); but Isabel attempts to transcend the narrow limits of her role in men's plots. She becomes instrumental in Mortimer's escape when he is imprisoned in the Tower of London, helps him raise an army against the King, and puts her son on the throne under his Regency. The demoralised Edward, never quite recovering from the murder of

⁵⁴ See, for example, David Stacton's *Remember Me* (1957), Christopher Short's *The Black Room* (1964) and Gillian Freeman's *The Alabaster Egg* (1970), all inspired by the strange homosexual life of King Ludwig II of Bavaria.

Gaveston, is kept prisoner in a series of English castles, each less hospitable than the last. Isabel gains intimacy with her lover - but also the unflattering title, 'She-Wolf of France'.

Indeed, as the novel progresses, it works to revise or undermine many of the romantic assumptions with which it began by appearing to endorse. Its most important shift is its self-elevation to the status of tragedy, with Edward - rather than Isabel - as its tragic hero. Its model here is Shakespeare rather than Aeschylus. There are in fact many Shakespearean moments in the novel - Isabel learns the truth about the relationship between Edward and Gaveston, for example, when she overhears two gardeners discussing court affairs. Like Richard II, Edward emerges as something of a poet-King (his one prison communication to his son takes the form quite literally of a poem), whose "tragedy", as Marguerite appreciates, "'is that he was born heir to a throne'" (51). Asserting her historical agency to the point of gaining a reputation for villainy, Isabel is nevertheless ultimately defeated by male plotting: Bishop Orleton, in league with Mortimer, tricks her into authorising Edward's death-warrant. At the end of the novel, Isabel's partial, female perspective on events is invoked not to demonstrate Edward's neglect of her erotic needs, but to reinforce his tragic status: his mistreatment at the hands of his various 'hosts', and his brutal execution at Berkeley Castle (he was, of course, murdered by having a hot iron rod inserted into his rectum, which burnt out his bowels but left no mark of violence on his body), are reported to an unsuspecting Isabel by an embalming-woman, Druscilla. Her narrative - relentless, choric, improbably eloquent - seems sent to Isabel "'to torture [her]'" ; but as Druscilla tartly points out, "'it is not *you* who are tortured, Madam. I, who embalmed the late King's body, should know'" (289). Edward's weakness is redefined as a tragic weakness, his homosexuality a fatal flaw; Mortimer's strength, which once so delighted Isabel, is exposed as insecure, requiring the violent suppression of threatening 'inferiors'.

Attempting to capture the post-war historical romance in its enactment of a particular cultural anxiety, I have throughout this chapter stressed the contiguity between sexological and romantic discourse, their alliance in the construction of the male homosexual as deviant. But in the determination with which novels such as *The Lute-player* and *Isabel the Fair* direct our attention to the flaws and tensions within the romantic paradigm,

rather than to its successes and cohesions, we might also locate a rather more affirmative homosexual statement. A disruptor of dynastic continuity, a usurper of feminine privilege, a frustrator, above all, of female erotic pleasure, the male homosexual has consistently been accorded a leading role in the literary (anti)romance; the fact that the *historical* romance has so frequently foregrounded the 'ill husband' has only compounded his status as romantic 'folk-devil'.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, in their very insistence upon the homosexual's historical resilience, romances effectively imply the necessity of accommodating sexual variety - a liberal, if not radical, message for a post-war culture in which, as we've seen, many disciplines were infused with a new optimism about homosexual 'cures', and homosexuality itself was still, in Britain, illegal.⁵⁶ As we shall see in the next chapter, some novelists of the '50s and '60s privileged precisely those ancient same-sex models which were distant from modern, Western paradigms; historical romancers, however, worked both within and *with* post-war homosexual narratives. Seton's Nirac de Bayonne is, we might remember, simply a particular "type of man"; Lofts' Richard was not 'made' "a lover of women"; Barnes' Edward, most strikingly, is a tragic hero, fatally pressed by social convention into a role for which he is unfit. Such figures demand, indeed assume - in their readers, as in their wives - a tolerance of their inconvenient but inescapable conditions. Many homosexual apologists of the 1950s asked for no more.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ The term, in this context, is Bridget Fowler's; she identifies the 'masterless woman' as another of the "folk-devils of the traditional romance", in *The Alienated Reader: Women and Romantic Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Hemel Hempstead, 1991), p. 8.

⁵⁶ The historical romance's affirmation of the homosexual condition could even play a role in homosexual historiography itself: Noel I. Garde's biographies of Richard I and Richard II, for example, in his 1964 *Jonathan to Gide: the Homosexual in History*, cite *The Lute-player* and *Katherine* as their sole sources.

⁵⁷ Re-emerging in the historical (anti)romances of later decades, of course, the homosexual 'ill husband' might have a rather different significance. In Hilda Lewis' retelling of Isabel's story, *Harlot Queen* (London, 1970), for example, Edward's homosexuality is once again a "fatal flaw" (p. 66); but in this post-decriminalisation, GLF-contemporary text, his wife's unsatisfied 'hunger' constitutes a critique of pro-homosexual liberalism: "'How much longer must I endure the slight the King puts upon me?'" Isabel asks tolerant Queen Margaret. "'Every man to his nature - as you say! And the King's nature I begin, alas, to understand. But what of woman's nature; what of *my* nature - answer me that!'" (p. 46).

CHAPTER 8

Citizens of Nowhere: the Male Romances of Mary Renault and Bryher

While literary historians, both gay and straight, have identified a weighty tradition of male-authored lesbian fictions - including works such as Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, Louÿs' *Songs of Bilitis*, James' *The Bostonians* - few have really addressed the considerable body of women's writing about homosexual men. As we have just seen, male homosexuality has been a prominent topos of the women's historical romance; but throughout the century, women writers have made substantial and important contributions to what we have come to think of as 'gay literature' itself - A. T. Fitzroy (Rose Allatini), for example, author of the controversial *Despised and Rejected* (1918); Blair Niles, who wrote the landmark *Strange Brother* (1931); Gillian Freeman, author (as 'Eliot George') of the groundbreaking *The Leather Boys* (1961); and, more recently, Chris Hunt, whose series of gay historical romances I shall be examining in chapter 9.¹ And if women in general have enriched the gay corpus, then lesbians in particular - amongst others Willa Cather, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Marguerite Yourcenar, Patricia Highsmith - have consistently produced influential gay fictions. Their work recalls that of Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper, and of Annie Adams Fields, discussed in earlier chapters; like 'Apollo's Written Grief' and 'Antinous', many of the most memorable homosexual texts to be produced by lesbian authors have also been historical.

It is, indeed, upon two particular lesbian historical novelists - Mary Renault and Bryher - that I shall be concentrating in this chapter. Despite enjoying vastly different

¹ This list could, of course, be considerably extended, to include authors of sympathetic homosexual characters such as Naomi Mitchison, Carson McCullers, Iris Murdoch, Patricia Nell Warren, Elizabeth Lynn and Ursula Le Guin.

literary reputations (Renault is one of the most widely-read and best-respected historical novelists since Scott; Bryher - though lauded in her own day - has never achieved lasting critical recognition), the two novelists invite, almost demand, comparison. Both devoted the latter parts of their long, varied and contemporaneous careers to historical fiction; both - even while committed throughout their lives to female partners - were clearly fascinated by male romances, and by what I shall be calling the 'romance' of maleness. Both writers have, correspondingly, proved resistant to feminist and lesbian recuperation: their novels are very different to those lesbian texts examined in earlier chapters, which - whether by Vivien, Meagher, Goldsmith or Gordon - sought to recover various woman-centred cultural histories, and, in turn, beckon unmistakably to the lesbian literary historian. This chapter considers Renault and Bryher's novels as gay texts, tracing their continuities and cleavages with earlier homosexual historiography, and with post-war homosexual models; implicit in it, however, will be an assessment of their place in the *lesbian* literary tradition.

Mapping homosexuality: Mary Renault

More than any other writer this century, Mary Renault demands recognition as the modern champion of Greek Love. The series of historical novels she produced between the 1950s and the late 1970s are marked with a thoughtfulness and an erudition which brought her to the notice of critics and classicists alike; the candour with which she addressed the homosexual mores of ancient Greece secured her a grateful gay male readership which her work has never lost, and pre-dated serious academic study of the "unspeakable vice of the Greeks" by more than twenty years.² Like Diotima, the prophetess of Plato's *Symposium* to whom Socrates owes his paiderastic education, Renault offered herself via her Hellenism as a "professor of (male) desire",³ a figure who

² As David M. Halperin points out, in the Introduction to *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (London and New York, 1990), academic reticence about the centrality of homosexual practices in ancient Greek culture continued from Forster's day until the late 1970s, which saw the publication of several ground-breaking studies, including K.J. Dover's *Greek Homosexuality* (1978), John Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (1980), and Foucault's *The Use of Pleasure* (1985).

³ The phrase is Halperin's: *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, p. 114.

both enunciated, and gave instruction in, masculine erotics.

Few of the readers of Renault's historical novels may have been aware of her own lesbianism; readers who have come to Renault in recent years will almost certainly be unfamiliar with the cluster of novels with contemporary settings she wrote before devoting her career to historical fiction: novels like the best-selling *Purposes of Love* (1939), in which a heterosexual romance is complicated by bisexuality, and *The Friendly Young Ladies* (1944), in which a lesbian relationship gives way to heterosexual attraction. Renault's most celebrated non-historical novel today is, perhaps, *The Charioteer* (1953), one of the earliest up-beat gay fictions of the post-war period, which secured for its author the gay male following she would so delight with her later historical novels. This was her last novel with a contemporary setting; it holds the key, as we shall see, to her subsequent preoccupation with ancient Greece.

Underpinning Renault's early novels was a growing fascination with the classics. David Sweetman, in his recent biography, elucidates the mythic subtext of *Purposes of Love* and *Return to Night* (1947);⁴ *The Charioteer's* relationship with Greek narrative is even more elaborate. Its title recalls Plato's *Phaedrus*, the dialogue in which, debating the nature of love, Socrates likens the human soul to a charioteer with an ill-matched pair of horses - a divine white horse, and a base, black one. The horses seek to pull their driver in different directions: skywards, in emulation of the gods, and earthwards, in pursuit of a less noble ideal; the charioteer must struggle to maintain a stable course between aspiration and lust. The *Phaedrus* is a key text in *The Charioteer*. Its imagery is recalled by Renault's; her characters quote from it; it is passed, in book form, from one gay lover to another. It is first given to the novel's main character, Laurie, by his schoolboy idol, Ralph; Laurie's increasing empathy with the Socratic erotic ideal accompanies his growing understanding of his own homosexuality. Wounded at Dunkirk, he is sent to a military hospital where he meets Andrew, a young conscientious objector with whom he falls in love. He suspects Andrew of latent homosexual feelings of his own, but shrinks from the responsibility of enlightening him. By chance, he is invited to a gay party; he finds the gossipy, affected atmosphere of the party repellent, but it reunites him with the adult Ralph, now a sea-captain and, like himself, disabled. The

⁴ David Sweetman, *Mary Renault: A Biography* (London, 1993).

novel charts Laurie's growing relationship with both Ralph and Andrew, his negotiation of the heterosexual pressures exerted over him by his mother, his fellow servicemen and the hospital nurses, and his dealings with the odious gay subculture. At the novel's close, Laurie has decided to renounce Andrew for the boy's own sake, and is at the beginning of an affair with Ralph. The novel ends with a return to the imagery of the *Phaedrus*, and a temporary respite from the conflict within the punctilious lover's soul:

Staying each his hunger on what pasture the place affords them, neither the white horse nor the black reproaches his fellow for drawing their master out of the way. They are far, both of them, from home, and lonely, and lengthened by their strife the way has been hard. Now their heads droop side by side till their long manes mingle, and when the voice of the charioteer falls silent they are reconciled for a night in sleep.⁵

At a time when, in both England and South Africa (to which Renault and her lover, Julie Mullard, had emigrated after the war), homosexual men still faced arrest and prosecution, the publication of a novel like *The Charioteer* was somewhat daring. Longman's, the British publishers with whom Renault had established her reputation as a serious popular author, were nervous about accepting it; Morrow, her American publishers, refused it: it did not appear in a US edition until 1959.⁶ Not surprisingly, modern gay critics have given the novel an important place in gay literary history; Claude Summers, for example, devotes a whole chapter of his survey of *Gay Fictions: Wilde to Stonewall* to it. As Summers points out, both the successes and the limitations of Renault's text are circumscribed by the liberal homosexual discourse of the post-war period, which called for the legal recognition of gay rights, but was uncomfortable with the more militant expressions of the gay subculture.⁷ Despite its classical subtext, *The Charioteer* is identifiably a novel of its time; indeed, it is in its very appeal to history that we can locate Renault's ambivalent relationship with modern homosexual models.

Like so many of the fictions produced in the post-war period, *The Charioteer* hinges, at least initially, upon a homosexual secret. Unlike *The Lute-player*, however, which plays with disclosure of homosexuality to the reader, Renault's novel offers

⁵ Mary Renault, *The Charioteer* (London, 1953), pp. 399-400. Further references will be included in the text.

⁶ Sweetman, *Mary Renault*, p. 145.

⁷ Claude J. Summers, *Gay Fictions: Wilde to Stonewall* (New York, 1990).

Laurie's perspective on negotiating heterosexual assumption and evading potentially hostile speculation. Even so, Laurie is not dissimilar to Lofts' Richard (the two novels were, indeed, almost contemporary): though he is able to conceal it by a careful heterosexual performance, his "difference" from his fellow patients and the hospital staff is fundamental, and threatens to erupt at unguarded moments - for example, when he is recovering from the effects of anaesthetic.

'You shouldn't be doing all this for me, Nurse. I don't deserve it, you know. If you knew all about me, you wouldn't be good to me like you are.'
 'Hush, you've had an operation, you *must* keep quiet.'
 'I'm always having operations, I'm quite used to it. You mustn't worry, I know what to do. May I have a drink?'
 'There. That's enough. You'll be sick if you drink a lot.'
 'Don't go back over there. I want to hold your hand.'
 'Sister says you've got to keep quiet.'
 'She doesn't understand. You see, you see it's important. You don't think I'm like that, do you?'
 'Of course not, it's just the anaesthetic. When you've had a little sleep you'll be fine.' (40-1)

This is a significant (and humorous) exchange, in which the nurse, the reader and a disarmed Laurie participate with varying levels of knowledge. The issue of identifying who was and was not *like that* was one with which, as we've seen, post-war culture was particularly preoccupied (in 1963 the *Sunday Pictorial* would school its readers in 'How to Spot a Homo'⁸); Renault's originality in *The Charioteer* was to ally her readers with, rather than against, the homosexual dissembler. Such a strategy, however, inevitably creates new narrative casualties: the butt of the humour in the above exchange is, of course, the ingenuous nurse; later, the fully-conscious Laurie will carefully flirt with her.

She gazed at him with respect, and presently asked his opinion on the probable course of the war. Silly little dumbbell, he thought; but he could not analyse his affectionate amusement. The fact was that he found her a refreshing relief, and was already cutting and fitting himself a special personality to oblige her. [...] Watching her off he thought that she wore slacks well, as if she didn't think about them; she had the right kind of shoes, and moved from the hips. He smiled and waved, and, as he turned away, wondered what the brother was like. (97)

Another consistent stooge in the novel's homosexual comedy is Reg, the working-class

⁸ Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out* (London, 1990), p. 163.

soldier who occupies the bed next to Laurie's: the homosexual perspective recovered by *The Charioteer* has its own, significant, class and gender exclusions.

Despite Laurie's basic homosexual difference (signified ultimately, of course, by the disability he shares with Ralph - and, in spirit, at least, with many real homosexuals of the '50s and '60s), he is a product of Renault's impatience with traditional inversion theories. Her early fiction reveals a resistance to sexual categorisation: Mic and Vivian, the bisexual and androgynously-named main characters of *Purposes of Love*, "are people first, and belong to [their] sexes rather incidentally";⁹ Leo and Helen, the (apparently) lesbian *Friendly Young Ladies*, both indulge in an off-hand flirtation with the sexual adventurer Peter. The 'homosexuality' that emerges in *The Charioteer* is correspondingly a curiously dislocated one. There are what appear to be 'inverts' in the novel, but they are *camp* rather than *effeminate*: an important distinction, for Renault presents campness, as much as heterosexual behaviour, as a performance, an argot which the gay man might occasionally adopt, rather than a manner to which he is pathologically impelled. Laurie himself is quite capable of 'dropping a hairpin' (134) when he wants to; crucially, he understands campness to be a strategy for dealing with heterosexual contempt:

No, he thought, it was really too naïve to get so upset about it; one was supposed to carry off this kind of thing with a flick of the wrist and a light laugh which would tell the world one hadn't been trying. Playing at hearties with all these dreary common people; my dear, I'm exhausted, I couldn't have been more bored. (196)

Laurie's ideal is the rejection of performance, the assumption of a personal integrity that can honestly accommodate the fact of his sexual desires. He dreads the lies he must tell to heterosexual friends; he resents the gay ghetto into which he feels he is being impelled by heterosexuals and homosexuals alike. He requires a moral code with which his own society is unable to provide him: he is a "solitary still making his own maps" (135). Only with Ralph does he feel "rather less like a citizen of nowhere" (298).

The Charioteer is thus very different to that earlier homosexual 'problem' novel, *The Well of Loneliness*. (In an Afterword to the 1984 reissue of *The Friendly Young Ladies*, Renault recalls the "heartless laughter" with which, in 1938, she and her lover

⁹ Mary Renault, *Purposes of Love* (Harmondsworth, 1986; first published 1939), p. 79.

first read Hall's novel.¹⁰) Where Hall had queried - and where post-war sexologists were still, with new results, querying - the *nature* of homosexuality, Renault seeks a model of homosexual conduct, asking not, What is a homosexual?, but, How might one be a decent homosexual? This, of course, is where the classics come in. As significant as the Socratic dialogue Renault chose to underpin her fiction of modern gay life is the one she did *not* choose: the Greek text to which homosexual writers have most consistently appealed is Plato's *Symposium*. A series of speeches in celebration of Eros, the *Symposium* - as we saw in chapter 1 - contains most of the key narratives of gay Hellenism: Phaedrus' vision of the army of paiderastic couples, fighting side by side to victory or death; Pausanias' distinction between earthly and Uranian love; Socrates' valorisation of spiritual progeniture; and Aristophanes' myth explaining the vagaries of sexual attraction. (This last, invoked by Rolfe in his *The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole* in 1909, had recently resurfaced in Gore Vidal's pioneering *The City and the Pillar* [1948]).

But the classical text which Renault's characters adopt as the manual of their desire *directs* its readers to continence and dignity, rather than *explaining* them to themselves or others; like Symonds' essays, *The Charioteer* treats homosexuality as an ethical, rather than social, 'problem'. Indeed, the narrative is punctuated by scenes recalling the symposia - drinking parties - of ancient Greece, in which men debate the various aspects of, and the cultural conditions imposed upon, homosexual love. There is some discussion of individual etiologies of homosexuality (and the novel's opening scenes, in which a five year-old Laurie is plunged into Oedipal crisis, seem to endorse a crude psychological model); but debate centres upon the issue of *being* homosexual in a hostile climate, and ultimately subsumes the sexuality issue into a broader moral context: "'It's not what one is,'" Ralph says loftily to a sympathetic Laurie, "'it's what one does with it'" (152).

As we've seen, the idea that the homosexual's access to self-respect and social responsibility was hampered by heterosexual intolerance - in the form, for example, of legislation which rendered him liable to blackmail, or forced him into a 'vicious' gay subculture - was a pertinent one in the 1950s, and often a keynote of liberal argument. Ralph's individualist project is rendered more urgent by the context that provokes it: the dreary gay party in which he and Laurie participate only reluctantly, but which they must

¹⁰ Mary Renault, Afterword to *The Friendly Young Ladies* (London, 1984), p. 281.

attend if they are to meet other homosexuals. Other writers whose work we have examined - particularly those concerned with the same-sex lover's potential as an agent of social transformation - have been preoccupied with the relationship between the present and the past, often imagining an erotic or artistic continuum in which modern homosexuals and their august ancestors might confer or commune. Like Symonds' 'Eudiades', however, *The Charioteer* laments the *discontinuity* between the present and the glorious homosexual past, as Renault notes the debasement of homosexuality in a climate of heterosexual intolerance. "'It's only since it's been made impossible that it's been made so damned easy'", complains Ralph.

'It's got like prohibition, with the bums and crooks making fortunes out of hooch, everyone who might have had a palate losing it, nobody caring how you hold your liquor, you've been smart enough if you get it at all. You can't make good wine in a bath-tub in the cellar, you need sun and rain and fresh air, you need a pride in the job you can tell the world about. Only you can live without drink if you have to, but you can't live without love.' (349)

The ultimate sentimentality of Ralph's vision should not, of course, distract us from its exclusiveness. His homosexual ideal involves the maintenance of certain standards - standards of discrimination and continence - which ensure that being a homosexual must never be "easy", but which, as in the *Phaedrus*, must involve the individual in a constant struggle for self-control and self-improvement. The nation-state of which Ralph and Laurie are the proper citizens is, of course, ancient Athens.

'They were tolerant in Greece and it worked. But, Christ, there was something a bit different to tolerate. There was a standard; they showed the normal citizen something. [...] In fact they took on the obligations of men in their friendships instead of looking for bluebirds in a fun-fair; and if they didn't, they bloody well weren't tolerated, and a good job too.' (234)

Athenian culture is valuable to Ralph not simply because it sanctioned homosexual behaviour, but because it discriminated between forms of homosexual relations. But of the standard it set, modern gay men - even Ralph and Laurie - will always fall short; its pattern is one they can only strive, in isolation and with imperfect results, to map onto the lineaments of their own lives.

Historical fiction gave Renault a forum in which to realise Ralph's vision of

homosexual partnership as the privileged site of manly endeavour. Her next novel, *The Last of the Wine* (1956), identifies ancient Greece as a culture in which the border between homosexual desire and social responsibility was not - as it was in the 1950s - anxiously asserted and aggressively policed, but gloriously dissolved; her subsequent novels would all elaborate upon this ideal. Between them, they span the relatively brief period from the genesis of classical Athens in the sixth century BC to the years immediately following the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC - though her two novels which rework the Theseus myth (*The King Must Die* [1958] and *The Bull from the Sea* [1962]) are set in the Mycenaean period, and trace the tribal, virtually prehistoric, roots of Greek culture. Renault's fiction helped to fuel a more general resurgence of interest in classical history in the literature and popular culture of mid-century Europe and America. Robert Graves, whose *Claudius* novels had appeared in the 1930s, produced his own re-telling of the Greek myths in 1955; Anouilh and Sartre, with plays like *Antigone* and *Les Mouches*, had made theirs in the 1940s. Marguerite Yourcenar, whose retiring, expatriate lesbian career resembled Renault's, resuscitated a gallery of classical icons - including Achilles, Patroclus and Sappho - in *Feux* (1936), and, more famously, recuperated Hadrian and Antinous for literary respectability with her 1951 *Mémoires d'Hadrien*. Popular reinventions of ancient history, however, remained intransigently heterosexual. These mainly took the form of the 'sword and sandal' epics - *Ben-Hur* (1959), *Spartacus* (1959), *Jason and the Argonauts* (1962) - which were enthusiastically produced by the American and Italian film industries throughout the '50s and '60s.¹¹ (Indeed, Twentieth Century-Fox planned a film version of Renault's *The King Must Die* - but had to abandon the scheme due to overspending on Burton and Taylor's *Cleopatra* [1962].¹²) Other novelists - Henry Treece, Peter Green, Alfred Duggan - explored the classical theme, and were all, like Renault, widely-read.

As with her earlier fiction, Renault managed to situate her historical novels in the overlap between the popular and the highbrow. Like Treece's, they were assimilable into the historical-adventure genre (indeed, they have often been recommended reading for

¹¹ Derek Elley, *The Epic Film* (London, 1984).

¹² Sweetman, *Mary Renault*, p. 197.

older children), and were frequently marketed as such.¹³ But, like Anouilh, Renault reworked historical narrative to make subtle commentaries on modern events. All her historical novels were written after her emigration to South Africa; her arrival there coincided with the election to government of the Afrikaner Nationalist Party, which was to introduce its series of aggressive apartheid laws throughout the 1950s, and inflame the country's already tense racial climate. Her preoccupation with ancient tyrannies reflects her anxiety about modern ones; her political vision, however, was less radical than those of earlier writers like Mitchison and Warner, both of whom exploited the historical setting to explore alternative social, as well as sexual, relations. (Niko's decision in *The Mask of Apollo* [1966], for example, to perform the *Bacchae* for the tyrant Dionysios because of its intrinsically ennobling qualities, reflects Renault's own, lonely stance against the arts boycott of South Africa in the 1960s.¹⁴) Her own politics were frankly élitist;¹⁵ as we shall see, she was never interested in foregrounding the limits of the classical (slave-owning, misogynist) democratic ideal, within the terms of which - definitively, in *The Last of the Wine*, but effectively throughout her entire historical *oeuvre* - she constructed her homosocial romances.

Set in the Greece of the fifth century BC, *The Last of the Wine* covers, roughly, the period of the Pelopponesian War - a critical time for ancient Athens, under threat from Sparta and internal treachery - and ends just before the death of Socrates. Taking the form of the memoirs of the Athenian citizen Alexias, it is also the story of his youthful affair with the noble Lysis. The two narratives - of politics, and desire - intersect: both involve dilemmas of personal integrity, of fidelity and honour, and developments in one affect the course of the other. Playing out the novel's gay romance on the debating-ground and the battlefield, in the philosophical academy and the palaestra, Renault returned to same-sex desire the virilising aspect lent it by earlier homosexual utopianists.

But like the more thoughtful of the Victorian Hellenists - most obviously, Symonds

¹³ "Excitement, adventure, the magic of the past", promises the front cover of the Giant Cardinal paperback edition of *The King Must Die* (New York, 1959), " - all sparkle in this brilliant and lusty tale of ancient Greece."

¹⁴ For her thoughts on the boycott, see Sweetman, *Mary Renault*, pp. 245-6.

¹⁵ Renault opposed apartheid, but supported the introduction of only qualified black franchise - and believed that "a lot of White countries would benefit from it too." (Quoted by Sweetman, *Mary Renault*, p. 214.)

- Renault's reinvention of Greek Love exposes its *distance* from modern, post-sexological erotic configurations. For it is not a *homosexual* culture that she depicts in *The Last of the Wine*, but a *paiderastic* one, in which sexual relationships between youths and older men serve to educate the former into the meanings and responsibilities of citizenship, rather than of 'sexuality' in the modern sense. In Renault's ancient Greece - as in her Platonic master-texts, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* - the paiderastic ideal is something which must be striven towards; as in *The Charioteer*, beginning and maintaining a homosexual relationship is fraught with potential dishonour. The handsome Alexias must negotiate the bath-houses and lascivious older men of Athens: while still a boy, he is molested by one of his father's friends at a drinking-party; like his schoolmates, he is accompanied by a chaperone on his travels around the city until he is of an age to take a protective older lover. Selecting one, however, from the host of eager suitors, is a serious task. He feels insulted by the attentions of the unscrupulous Kritias, and humiliated by the foolish Polymedes, who installs himself in a love-sick pose on the threshold of Alexias' family home. Only in the noble Lysis does he recognise a worthy lover, one who will guide him to responsible citizenship; crucially, when the two men plight their troth, they make vows of honour, not of love:

'As the gods hear me, Alexias, your goods shall be mine, and your honour shall be like my own to me; and I will stand to it with my life.' I felt more than myself, and answered, 'Don't be afraid, Lysis, that while you are my friend I shall ever come to dishonour; for rather than be a shame to you I will die.' He put his right hand on mine and his left about my shoulders and said, 'May it never be less than this with us.' With these words we kissed. The sun was sinking, and the shadows of the poplars were longer than the trees. After talking a little longer, we walked back to the City.¹⁶

The novel thus celebrates a certain vision of homosexual relations, but the paiderastic system it details is clearly not commensurable with modern homosexual culture. Both Alexias and Lysis marry, and both have concubines; by the end of his narrative Alexias has become a family man, surveying the romance of his youth. To be sure, Renault's later novels do foreground a more recognisably 'gay' argot: Niko's thespian stories in *The Mask of Apollo* (1966), for example, or the eunuch Bagoas' narrative in *The Persian Boy* (1972). On the whole, however, Renault's ancient Greece - a place of ethical rigidity, but

¹⁶ Mary Renault, *The Last of the Wine* (London, 1960; first published 1960), p. 72.

sexual fluidity - occupies an ambiguous position in relation to modern homosexual discourse. Providing him with a city state of which the noble same-sex lover is the ideal son, *The Last of the Wine* and subsequent novels repatriate the dispossessed homosexual of *The Charioteer* - but at the cost of his 'homosexuality' itself.

This paradox was partly a product of Renault's scholarly integrity, partly an effect of her ambivalence towards homosexual politics. Despite her reputation as a modern Diotima (a reputation which was only compounded by the success of *The Last of the Wine*, many of whose readers felt she must be a man writing under a female *nom de plume*, and some of whom wrote "thanking her", in Sweetman's words, "for explaining their own feelings to them"¹⁷), Renault's stance on the homosexual issue was never commensurable with the political agenda of the gay rights movement whose growth accompanied that of her historical *oeuvre*. In her recent Afterword to the *Friendly Young Ladies*, for example, she laments the modern homosexual debasement of that "splendid Old French word", 'gay', and criticises gay activists for their "defensive stridency".¹⁸ She would not, presumably, have approved of my own reading of her work, which attempts to situate it in a tradition of homosexual historical fiction; indeed, the considerable gap that exists between her reputation and her literary project renders the placing of Renault in such a tradition problematic. The homosexual agenda informing her work is very different to that impelling the historical fantasies of Vivien, Meagher, Gordon and even Symonds. Her understanding of her historiographical project in almost anthropological terms (precisely, of course, what made her such a compelling historical novelist) rendered her unwilling to produce the kind of historical fictions I have been identifying - fictions which, whether written by homophile or homophobic authors, employ a greater or lesser degree of sexual essentialism to make their commentary on the sexualities of the present. "People in the past were not just like us", she wrote in 1979; "to pretend so is an evasion and a betrayal, turning our back on them so as to be easy among familiar things."¹⁹ Like Yourcenar - another author with an ambivalent relationship with homosexual politics - she clearly saw her fiction as a contribution to classical historiography, foregrounding her research and defending the *accuracy* of her

¹⁷ Sweetman, *Mary Renault*, pp. 150 and 184.

¹⁸ Mary Renault, *The Friendly Young Ladies*, p. 283.

¹⁹ From an article in the *London Magazine*, quoted in Sweetman, *Mary Renault*, p. 158.

vision in the afterwords she frequently appended to her novels. Indeed, she strove to capture the very cadences of Greek prose - adapting segments of the history-writing of Thucydides, for example, for the descriptive passages of *The Last of the Wine*, with minimal elaboration.²⁰

While it enabled her to recover at least a kind of homosexuality, Renault's unqualified appropriation of classical narrative inevitably limited her portrayal of women: the cultural model she recuperated, in which homosexual desire and moral responsibility were complementary, rather than mutually exclusive, did not welcome women into its generous rubric. Almost invariably, her sources are male-authored (though she does work a Sapphic ode or two into the text of *The Praise Singer* [1978]); if they are myths (as in the Theseus novels), they necessarily place her in collaboration with the misogynist paradigms of Western culture. Often, the events her novels describe are the originary moments of the modern patriarchy: the founding of Athenian democracy (*The Praise Singer*); the overthrow of matriarchal culture in the prehistoric world (*The King Must Die*). Where feminist and lesbian writers like Vivien and Meagher had revised ancient plots, Renault revitalised them, unprepared (presumably out of fidelity to her classical model) to make the imaginative leap required to produce a female-centred narrative. Hippolyta, Theseus' boyish Amazon wife in *The Bull From the Sea* and Renault's most well-developed female character, recalls the omniscient women warriors of *The Green Scamander*; but Renault's celebration of Amazon autonomy is ultimately compromised by her deference to the imperatives of the heterosexual plot which Meagher so spectacularly flouted. Hippolyta is taken from her Amazon homeland (and female lover) by Theseus, after an eroticised contest of strength echoing the traditional romantic combat of Penthesilia and Achilles; later she is killed in battle, fighting alongside her husband against her old Amazon comrades: a casualty of Renault's narrative intransigence.

While female historical fiction writers like Seton and Barnes were effectively fashioning a new genre in which to reconstruct or invent the female spaces elided by traditional historiography, Renault used male narrators who were unable, and unwilling, to investigate the women's quarters. When Renault's female characters leave the orchestrating male gaze, they leave her narratives: "Singing the women led her to the

²⁰ See Sweetman, *Mary Renault*, p. 159, for a demonstration of this.

bridal room," says Theseus of his new wife Phaedra, in *The Bull From the Sea*, "and did whatever takes women an hour to do; and the youths with torches, singing, led me in to her."²¹ The one striking exception to this rule is her last novel, *Funeral Games* (1981), in which she drops the male narrator in favour of a third-person narrative that ranges over a variety of perspectives, many of them female. However, the polyphony of *Funeral Games* is a symptom of disorder, the assertion of female agency an aspect of the deterioration of classical harmony: the novel describes the breakdown of the Macedonian empire after the death of Alexander, and the violent vying for authority between his various successors.

Again, Renault's commitment to retelling men's stories recalls Yourcenar: it is "virtually impossible," the latter wrote in her 'Reflections on the Composition of *Memoirs of Hadrian*', "to take a feminine character as a central figure, to make Plotina, for example, rather than Hadrian, the axis of my narrative. Women's lives are much too limited, or else too secret".²² Like Yourcenar, Renault was clearly sensitive to the restrictions imposed upon women, in the present as well as the ancient past; in practice, however, the absence of female space in her writing underscores women's status as patriarchy's unknowable and potentially dangerous 'other', in contradistinction to which men not only define themselves, but forge their homosocial and sexual bonds. What women *romanciers* recuperated for historical narrative - the female dramas of childbirth, menstruation and desire - Renault excises from her romantic ideal: "Her hot breath was in his ear; her wet softness seemed to seep even through his corselet; he was half stifled with the rank female smell of dirty flesh and hair, blood, milk and sex".²³ Ultimately, it is woman's own devious biology that keeps her off the historical stage (Eurydike, for example, about to address the Macedonian Assembly with a speech asserting her own rights to the crown in *Funeral Games*, is prevented from doing so by the untimely arrival of her period); men's traumatic encounters with women's bodies only propel them more firmly towards the cleaner, uncomplicated delights of homosexual romance: "He put out his hand. Alexander's came out and touched it, deathly cold; then closed on it crushingly, so that he caught his breath with mingled relief and pain. 'You're with me,' Hephaestion

²¹ Mary Renault, *The Bull from the Sea* (Harmondsworth, 1973; first published 1962), p. 137.

²² Marguerite Yourcenar, *Memoirs of Hadrian*, trans. Grace Frick (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 261.

²³ Mary Renault, *Fire From Heaven* (Harmondsworth, 1972; first published 1970), p. 178.

said, 'I love you. You mean more to me than anything. I'd die for you any time. I love you.'²⁴

The real romance of Renault's gay fiction, as I hinted earlier, is a romance of - or perhaps *with* - maleness. Renault herself admitted that she believed men to have "some extra reserve of neural strength, some capacity for sustained intensity and inner drive, which women do not possess".²⁵ Her Alexander novels - *Fire From Heaven* and *The Persian Boy* - offer the most eloquent testimony to her fascination with (male) excellence, just as Yourcenar's *Memoirs of Hadrian* bears witness to hers. But neither novelist was unique in her fierce admiration of such figures; indeed, it is perhaps unsurprising that women writers - so often, like Bryher, aware of their own restrictions - should have pinned their liberatory fantasies upon the great homosocial heroes of antiquity.²⁶ Christina of Sweden, like Renault, was fascinated by the life of Alexander the Great, and attempted her own biography of the Macedonian King;²⁷ more recently, historical novelist Rosemary Sutcliff relocated classical homosociality to the heart of *British* history with her 1963 retelling of the Arthur legend, *Sword at Sunset*.²⁸

The lesbian romance with male homoeroticism is undoubtedly allied to, but ultimately distinct from, that butch identity which - at least when performed with a femme partner - parodically recalls a *heterosexual* configuration; like butchness, however, it has often distressed or alienated feminist commentators. Renault's fiction, certainly, has never encouraged feminist notice, and rarely received it. The female critics who have addressed

²⁴ Renault, *Fire From Heaven*, p. 199.

²⁵ Quoted in Sweetman, *Mary Renault*, p. 253.

²⁶ For an account of the lesbian attractions of Greek Love, see Alison Hennegan's 'On Becoming a Lesbian Reader', in Susannah Radstone (ed.), *Sweet Dreams: Sexuality Gender and Popular Fiction* (London, 1988), pp. 165-190.

²⁷ See *The Works of Christina Queen of Sweden* (London, 1753), the first English translation of Christina's writings, which contains her 'Maxims and Sentences' as well as her (unfinished) 'Reflections on the Life and Actions of Alexander the Great'.

²⁸ Rosemary Sutcliff, *Sword at Sunset* (London, 1963). Her King - Artos - is a Romano-British war-leader, struggling to maintain national cohesion after the Roman withdrawal. The fraternity of warriors he leads - "the Company", named after Alexander's personal regiment - are bound together with ties of fidelity and honour, and sometimes of sex, in which case they are effectively Theban: "If it keeps the lads happy and in fighting trim..." says Artos indulgently of the lovers Gault and Levin. "Give me a whole squadron of such sinners - so that they be young - and I'll not complain" (79). An unmistakable eroticism similarly suffuses the relationship between Artos himself and his comrade Bedwyr (the original Sir Lancelot). As in Renault's fiction, the war-camp and the battlefield are here the sites of glamour and romance. Bedwyr's affair with Queen Guenhumara disrupts his intimacy with Artos; her retirement to a convent, however, facilitates their reunion and consolidates their love. I am grateful to Nicola Bown for bringing this novel to my attention.

her novels have, on the whole, done so with discomfort, ill at ease with a literary identification with masculinity which extends, sometimes, almost to misogyny. Carolyn Heilbrun's brief consideration of Renault's work in her 1979 *Reinventing Womanhood* appears significantly in a chapter entitled 'The Failure of Imagination': she calls Renault "an apologist for female subservience".²⁹ Other critics have attempted to reclaim Renault's fiction as *lesbian* fiction: "Lesbian writers often do write of love between two men," notes Patricia Duncker, "an attachment which has historically always been easier to express and more openly celebrated. It is a conventional Lesbian disguise. One example is the historical novelist, Mary Renault". Elsewhere Duncker calls *Memoirs of Hadrian* a "closet lesbian text".³⁰

Such readings reflect a squeamishness on the part of feminist critics about confronting the homosexual interests of women writers, a reluctance to consider the lesbian-authored male romance beyond its 'failure' to meet the feminist standard, or its dubious role as a lesbian novel 'in disguise'. Eve Sedgwick offers us an alternative perspective on such romances by building on Gayle Rubin's suggestion that feminist theory may be an inadequate or even irrelevant tool with which to tackle issues of sexual oppression; she identifies a "rich tradition of cross-gender inventions of homosexuality" in the literature of the past century, and places Renault - along with Yourcenar, Compton-Burnett, Cather, and a variety of male writers - in its "distinguished constituency".³¹ Such an approach is not easily reconcilable with more traditional lesbian/feminist criticism: Terry Castle, for example, notes that Sedgwick's female authors are "significant choices all" (all four enjoyed life-long relationships with women partners, but remained unwilling to align themselves, politically, with lesbianism), and understands them to constitute "an all-new lesbian pantheon: of lesbians who enjoy writing about male-male

²⁹ Carolyn Heilbrun, *Reinventing Womanhood* (London, 1979), p. 79. Yourcenar has provoked similar reactions in women critics; Georgia Hooks Shurr, for example, in her *Marguerite Yourcenar: A Reader's Guide* (Lanham, 1987), finds her female characters subordinate to the male, and stereotypical: "the absent or mad mother; the silent, boring, sick sister; the ignorant, frigid, demanding wife" (p. 90).

³⁰ Patricia Duncker, *Sisters and Strangers: An Introduction to Contemporary Feminist Fiction* (Oxford, 1992), p. 170. The reference to *Memoirs of Hadrian* as a closet lesbian text appears in her index, p. 286.

³¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Across Gender, Across Sexuality: Willa Cather and Others', in *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 88 (1989), pp. 53-72, p. 66.

eros [...] more than its female equivalent".³²

In the clash between Sedgwick's and Castle's perspectives, important issues in lesbian criticism are exposed. Like Castle, we might balk at attempts to occlude the lesbian canon with texts and writers operating apparently in the service of masculine, even patriarchal, interests; but ignoring or, worse, dismissing such texts involves falsifying lesbian literary history, and obscuring the important allegiances and identifications formed not between women, but between lesbians and men (gay or otherwise).³³ Even more importantly, it obstructs discussion of those lesbian writers whose work, while perhaps not 'gynocentric', nevertheless contains radical sexual and social commentaries.

One such writer - notably absent even from Sedgwick's distinguished constituency of trans-sex/gender fantasists - is the British historical novelist, Bryher. Like Renault's, Bryher's fiction has received at best only partial readings; as Ruth Hoberman points out in a perceptive essay, her work has been consistently neglected by critics more preoccupied with her influence upon the life and writing of her more illustrious lover, H.D.. Hoberman herself, however, significantly examines only one novel from Bryher's *oeuvre*, the 1958 *Gate to the Sea*. For her, *Gate* problematises historiographical assumptions, and attempts to recuperate female historical experience in particular: she sees the novel as celebrating ancient matriarchal traditions after the manner of H.D.'s *Palimpsest* (1926). "To write historical novels", she claims, "is in fact for Bryher to collude with Clio, subverting the certainty of historical discourse, transgressing the boundaries of historical plots, as she evokes, under erasure, a world of feminine power and intimacy".³⁴ As we shall see, however, in a more typical Bryher novel power is an unmistakably *masculine* prerogative; intimacy, similarly, is enjoyed between men. Foregrounding her collusion with Clio, the muse of history, Hoberman elides - or perhaps, in the interests of her feminist analysis, suppresses - Bryher's long-term romance

³² Terry Castle, note to 'Sylvia Townsend Warner and the counterplot of lesbian fiction', in Joseph Bristow, *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing* (London and New York, 1992), pp. 128-47, p. 244n.

³³ This chapter attempts to identify only one alternative lesbian tradition, that of writing which portrays male homosexuality. On what terms might we address the 'lesbian' 'tradition' (already the labels begin to come unstuck) of 'heterosexual' writing, as maintained by novelists such as Naomi Jacob and Mazo de la Roche?

³⁴ Ruth Hoberman, 'Multiplying the Past: Gender and Narrative in Bryher's *Gate to the Sea*', in *Contemporary Literature*, 31 (3) (Fall 1990), pp. 354-372, p. 370.

with Eros, the "patron of paiderastia".³⁵ It is to an examination of this romance - an examination that is also a recuperation and, even, a celebration - that I want to devote the remainder of this chapter.

'Beyond the charted Old-World ends': Bryher

Like Renault, Bryher was impatient with the limitations of femininity; but where Renault seems to have channelled her frustrations into a distrust of sexual categorisation, Bryher, along with many lesbians who were young adults in the 1910s and '20s, embraced the then new inversion theories of homosexuality. She was, indeed, analysed by Havelock Ellis, and welcomed his conclusions: "we got on to the question of whether I was a boy sort of escaped into the wrong body", she wrote to H.D. in 1919,

and he says it is a disputed subject but quite possible and showed me a book about it... we agreed it was most unfair for it to happen but apparently I am quite justified in pleading I ought to be a boy... I am just a girl by accident.³⁶

Like many other lesbians of the period ([Marguerite] Radclyffe Hall, Tony [Clare] Atwood, Mickie [Naomi] Jacob), she early on adopted an androgynous pseudonym - her original name was Winifred Ellerman - for private as well as for professional purposes; Barbara Guest, in her biography of H.D., claims that Bryher (like Gertrude Stein, and Hall) disliked being referred to as "she".³⁷

Certainly, her fiction suggests an attraction to masculine personae: of the eight historical novels she produced between 1952 and 1969, four have male narrators, most foreground male characters, and many feature, or hint at, homoerotic desire. Informing her historical fantasies, however, was a sensitivity to patriarchal exclusions. She renounced her early fascination with the Arab world and its history, for example, when

³⁵ John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (London, 1901), p. 40. Other critics have approached Bryher as Duncker approaches Yourcenar: Renée R. Curry, for example, claims that she "masked her own lesbianism beneath a subtly gay male plot". Sharon Malinowski (ed.), *Gay & Lesbian Literature* (Detroit, 1994), p. 57.

³⁶ Quoted in Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia L. Smyers, *Writing for their Lives: The Modernist Women 1910-1940* (London, 1987), p. 38.

³⁷ Barbara Guest, *Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and Her World* (New York, 1984), p. 122.

she began "to analyse its attitude toward women".³⁸ Like Nora Wydenbruck - to whom attempting to broach the male preserve of Greek and Latin studies was "forcing my way into the world of the classics like an unbidden guest who has not been given the password"³⁹ - she also recognised the inappropriateness of the woman writer's fascination with classical Greece: "I want to be as wild as possible," she told H.D.. "Not Athenian. I should never have had the citizenship anyhow."⁴⁰

A still stronger influence upon the shape of her historical fiction was her deep anxiety about modern political oppressions. Though she had been born in England, she moved in the expatriate circles of Paris and Berlin, had settled in Switzerland in the '30s, and was thus a first-hand witness of the growth of European Fascism - indeed, she assisted over a hundred German refugees over the Swiss border before joining H.D. to sit out the war in London.⁴¹ Unlike Renault's novels, which collectively cover the short period in which classical ideals were at their most well-defined, Bryher's traverse a range of historical settings in their attempt to reiterate the recurrent traumas of military aggression. *The Fourteenth of October* (1952) and *This January Tale* (1966) give the Saxon perspective on the Norman invasion of eleventh-century Britain. *Roman Wall* (1954) depicts the flight in AD 265 of a group of refugees from Aventicum, an outpost of the crumbling Roman Empire. *Gate to the Sea* (1958), set a few years after the death of Alexander the Great, looks at life in the occupied Greek colony of Paestum, whose inhabitants were enslaved by Lucanian invaders.⁴² Such scenarios had obvious modern parallels - nor had Bryher any qualms about tampering with history to make the parallels clearer still: the *TLS* noted the anti-Nazi resonances of *The Coin of Carthage* (1963), for example, but took objection to the concentration camp-style compound to which Orbius, a Roman prisoner, is committed, pointing out that the Carthaginians would more likely have sold their captives as slaves.⁴³ As with the historical fiction of Renault and Yourcenar, to focus upon the homoerotic content of Bryher's writing is to make of it what

³⁸ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, p. 156.

³⁹ Nora Wydenbruck, *My Two Worlds: An Autobiography* (London, 1956), p. 113.

⁴⁰ Bryher, *Heart*, p. 194.

⁴¹ Guest, *Herself Defined*, p. 249.

⁴² All of Bryher's historical novels were first published in New York, the London editions appearing one or two years later in nearly every case. Publication dates quoted in the text refer to the original, American, editions; page references, as will be apparent, are to the British editions. Only her last novel, *The Colors of Vaud* (New York, 1969), was never published in Britain.

⁴³ *Times Literary Supplement*, 23 January 1964, p. 72.

must inevitably be a rather partial reading. Unlike a novel such as *The Green Scamander*, which, as I have argued, is in a very striking way 'about' lesbianism, Bryher's historical novels have a variety of themes - enacting tensions between, amongst other things, cultural heritage and cultural dissidence; debating both the necessity, and the provisionality, of historical narrative itself. Nevertheless, like Renault and Yourcenar, Bryher frequently invoked male-male desire as a privileged term in the playing-out of these broader concerns.

Both quantitatively and qualitatively, however, the homosexual 'spaces' in Bryher's fiction are very different to those contained by the novels of Mary Renault, and require correspondingly different interpretative skills from her gay readers. Perhaps for this very reason, Bryher's novels have frequently been overlooked by lesbian and gay critics; their fate at the hands of less sensitive commentators has, indeed, often been a serious *misreading*. Barbara Guest, for example, calls them "splendid adventure stories".

They were historical novels with settings in which a lone boy, faced by danger, would conquer all. There was always a battle and there was always a boy. Bryher's novels are excellent examples of historical fiction upon which children can build their early concepts of history. The pathos was that she believed they were adult books.⁴⁴

However, Bryher's original readers seem to have believed that her novels were adult books, too; with their enthusiastic reviews Guest is clearly unfamiliar. The *TLS*, for example, understood *Gate to the Sea* to be "a model of how to blend historical reality with modern intelligibility".⁴⁵ John Raymond, reviewing *Roman Wall* for *The New Statesman and Nation*, called it "the best historical novel written this year. [...] I cannot recommend this book too highly"; he, in common with other critics, identified the parallels drawn by the fiction between ancient and modern political situations.⁴⁶ Guest seems to be confusing Bryher's novels with those splendid adventure stories through which, as a child, Bryher herself became introduced to history - the novels of G. A. Henty, to whose memory she unashamedly dedicated *The Coin of Carthage*.⁴⁷ But Bryher's understated, speculative fiction belongs to this genre only in an interrogative

⁴⁴ Guest, *Herself Defined*, p. 115.

⁴⁵ *Times Literary Supplement*, 17 July 1959, p. 421.

⁴⁶ *The New Statesman and Nation*, 27 Aug 1955, p. 251.

⁴⁷ Bryher also records her respect for and indebtedness to Henty in *The Heart to Artemis*.

role. There are no heroes in Bryher's novels; her characters are misfits: exiles and itinerants rather than adventurers, borderline cases (as in the film she made with her husband Kenneth MacPherson in 1930, which explores psychological, racial and sexual boundaries⁴⁸) at odds with their cultures, who often choose to leave their homelands behind. In no way do they reinforce, or participate in the reproduction of, the social order, in the way that Henty's stalwart British heroes - or, in their context, Renault's Greek ones - do. Wulf, for example, the narrator of *The Fourteenth of October*, opts for voluntary exile from captive England: he has become disillusioned with the way his Saxon countrymen have begun to accommodate the Norman invasion. The two people he loves - Rafe and Laurel - have married, and are prepared to follow the new Christian religion; Wulf, mourning the loss of ancient British traditions, prepares to set sail with a Byzantine seaman who has promised him companionship and passage to a new, possibly homoerotic, social order.

Similarly, in *Ruan* (1960), the novel's eponymous narrator escapes, with the help of a runaway slave, from the ubiquitous tribal bickering of sixth century Britain; he finds a place as a crewman on the ship of an eccentric Finn, Friedowald, bound for a mysterious island in the west - presumably America - where the soil is rich, the water sweet, "'and there is land enough for us all'".⁴⁹ With its emphasis upon the sea as an escape route from unwelcome obligation, Bryher's fiction reiterates an intensely personal fantasy of liberation: in her autobiography *The Heart to Artemis* she recalls that the dearest wish of her childhood and adolescence was to be a cabin-boy, and thus satisfy the adventuring spirit stifled by her Edwardian girl's education. But the attractions of *roving* were appreciated and celebrated by other women writers - particularly those whose gender unorthodoxies were also possibly sexual. Frances - writing as 'Frank' - Fleetwood had hymned the delights of comradeship in *The Threshold*, a collection of poems published in 1926. In 'The Pirate' an ageing buccaneer looks "Beyond the coombes [and] the rampart moors" which have "barred [his] manor from the sea", to times and places careless of domestic limits:

⁴⁸ *Borderline*, dir. Kenneth MacPherson, 1930: see Andrea Weiss, *Vampires and Violets* (London, 1992), pp. 18-20. Bryher married twice, to Robert McAlmon in 1921, and to MacPherson in 1927. Both men were bisexual; both unions were marriages of convenience.

⁴⁹ Bryher, *Ruan* (London, 1961), p. 188. Further references will be included in the text.

I roved the seas in Mary's reign,
 With Jack Carew and Killigrew,
 With Cobham, Horsey, and Tremayne,
 And Strangways and Red Rover's crew -
 A gallant company of friends.
 Beyond the charted Old-World ends
 To virgin waters of surmise;
 And back again to strive with Spain -
 Gold galleons for our prey and prize.⁵⁰

Bryher's novels locate a similar counter-cultural energy in male friendship, and a specifically homoerotic possibility in "the virgin waters of surmise" to which men, together, might sail: "Friedowald looked at me curiously, 'you cannot change customs, however stupid, unless - ' 'You find a new island.' We smiled, like conspirators, at each other" (124). Such conspiracies are effectively masculinist reworkings of the old sapphic dream of island autonomy - but ones which significantly attempt to counter the imperialist limitations of the Vivienesque Lesbian idyll. When James' sailor friend Martin, in *The Player's Boy* (1953), plans to smuggle him aboard a ship bound for the West Indies, he offers him the chance to escape from the social hierarchies and sexual hypocrisies of Elizabethan London, and settle in a non-exploitative colonial utopia: "'In the Indies there is room for all,'" he tells James; "'we are free and equal, and a man is what he can make of himself. [...If] he has luck, and is not scornful of the native hunters, there are no boundaries, he is his own master.'" ⁵¹

Bryher's novels thus locate romance in an ambiguous *elsewhere*, far from cultural centres, on or beyond the peripheries of cartographical certainty; from this position it beckons to those of her male characters who are, like Wulf, Ruan and Martin, disillusioned nationalists. As lesbian expatriates, both Renault and Bryher may have

⁵⁰ Frank (pseud. Frances) Fleetwood, *The Threshold* (London, 1926), p. 33. *The Threshold* is a fascinating and tantalising volume for the lesbian literary historian. Its long sonnet sequence 'The House of Friendship' celebrates the speaker's relationship with an older male friend who offers access to the world of liberty and adventure; one sonnet traces their friendship back through a variety of historical settings and "primal meeting[s]" (p. 20). While the 1920s may have popularised new, androgynous models of sexuality, *The Threshold* suggests that some women at least were nostalgic for old narratives of adventuring masculinity and decorative femininity: a whole series of poems address "My Lady", an enigmatic *femme fatale* to whom the ungendered narrator is at once master, troubadour and vassal. The volume is thus perhaps less closely related to Renault and Bryher's homoerotic romances than to a lesbian-heterosexual fantasy like Hall's 'Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself' (1934); curiously enough, Fleetwood and Hall also both entertained fantasies of having been previously incarnated in Renaissance Florence. (See Fleetwood's 'A Portrait', p. 8, and Michael Baker, *Our Three Selves: A Life of Radclyffe Hall* [London, 1985], p. 52.)

⁵¹ Bryher, *The Player's Boy* (London, 1957), pp. 43-4.

experienced forms of cultural alienation; to both writers, historical fiction may have constituted a form of compensatory fantasy. But where Renault's Hellenism recuperates for male homosexuals, at least, the city-state of which they are the proper, displaced citizens, in Bryher's writing same-sex desire and dispossession remain inextricably linked - but crucially revalorised, as privileged sites of cultural transformation. Where novels such as *The Charioteer*, *The Last of the Wine* and *Fire From Heaven* rescue an antique taxonomy of homosexual relations in which the ideal male lover is at the service of the state, Bryher's fiction celebrates same-sex bonding as implicitly anti-hegemonic. Such bonding is typically male, but, in Bryher's *oeuvre* as a whole, operates as only one of a range of unorthodox social configurations. What her novels explore is, precisely, the *underside* of Renault's vision of the ancient world: where Renault works with the big names of ancient history - with Socrates and Plato, with Simonides, Alexander and Theseus - Bryher foregrounds imaginary characters who are peasants, slaves, women and soldiers. Where Renault is fascinated with the agents of historical change, Bryher imagines, and gives a voice to, its subjects.

Hence the differences, for example, between Renault's treatment of Alexander's imperial campaign in *Fire From Heaven* and *The Persian Boy*, and Bryher's presentation of Hannibal's in *The Coin of Carthage*. Renault's texts are saturated with the charismatic presence of Alexander: the former begins with his childhood, the latter ends with his death. In *The Coin of Carthage*, on the other hand, Hannibal is notable for his *absence*: he appears only once, to address an overawed pedlar, Zonas, who sees only his horse, his cloak and his shield. For an "impression of the Commander's head" Zonas has to look to the silver coin handed him by Hannibal's attendant.⁵² The novel's real protagonists are the obscure inhabitants of Africa and Italy - Zonas and Dasius, Greek traders; Karus, a Roman soldier; Sybilla, his mother; Verna and Melania, his slaves - who are the, often bewildered, victims of the conflict between Carthage and Rome, and whose allegiances shift from one party to another as economic necessity dictates.

Like Mitchison's, Bryher's sympathies lie with the conquered;⁵³ and she finds in the gaps *between* victory narratives - in, for example, the enforced democracy of refugee

⁵² Bryher, *The Coin of Carthage* (London, 1964), p. 62.

⁵³ *The Conquered* was, of course, the title of Mitchison's first novel (1923), which explored the Gaulish experience of Roman invasion and nationalist resistance.

culture - the potential for a new social order. *Gate to the Sea* imagines the attempts of the Poseidonian people to retain their cultural heritage; they have become slaves, in their own city of Paestum, to the conquering Lucanians, and are forbidden to practise their faith, or even to speak their own language, except for on one day of each year. Harmonia, their priestess, attempts to keep the worship of Hera alive, but faces enforced retirement; Lykos and Phila, an aged slave couple, prefer the prospect of suicide to the separation they believe their Lucanian master plans for them. Eventually, all three escape, assisted by Harmonia's eccentric brother, an orphaned slave boy, and Myro, a young girl who has disguised herself as a boy and harbors a Bryher-like impatience with gender regulations: "I belong to the sea. I want to be a sailor. [...] I shall die if they shut me up in the women's quarters again".⁵⁴ As in earlier novels, the ocean offers freedom: the refugees escape from Paestum in a boat, leaving their frustrated Lucanian pursuers behind them on the shore. Heading into "the masterless sea" (126), they form a group to whom social hierarchies - and heterosexual conventions - do not apply: three mixed-sex couples - an aged husband and wife, a chaste priestess and her crazed brother, a nine year-old boy and a cross-dressed adolescent girl - none of which is commensurable with the standard romantic model.

Like the novels of Ivy Compton-Burnett - which obsessively revisit heterosexual topoi but, as Susan Crecy has argued, have relevance for lesbian studies in their unremitting exposure of the family 'nightmare'⁵⁵ - it is in their enactment of this kind of resistance to heterosexual imperatives that Bryher's novels most consistently request admission to the gay, and even the lesbian, canon. Indeed, *queer* might be a more appropriate, though anachronistic, description of their collective evasion of the demands and definitions of "reprosexuality",⁵⁶ their faith in the transformative energy of erotic dissidence. Bryher's relationship with both historiography and homosexuality was, clearly, rather different to Renault's; her novels, as we have seen, do not complement Renault's classic modern fictions of Greek Love, so much as critically annotate them. If Renault was Symonds' twentieth-century heir, Bryher was, perhaps, Carpenter's: like him, she

⁵⁴ Bryher, *Gate to the Sea* (London, 1959), p. 75. Further references will be included in the text.

⁵⁵ Susan Crecy, 'Ivy Compton-Burnett: Family as Nightmare', in Mark Lilly (ed.), *Lesbian and Gay Writing: An Anthology of Critical Essays* (Houndmills, 1990), pp. 13-23.

⁵⁶ The term is Michael Warner's, quoted by Scott Bravmann, 'Isaac Julien's *Looking For Langston*: Hughes, Biography and Queer(ed) History', in *Cultural Studies*, 7 (2) (May 1993), pp. 311-23, p. 312.

privileged the ancient manly institution of comradeship, but placed it at the heart of an extensive vision of social transformation involving issues of class, gender and nationalism, as well as of sexuality.

CHAPTER 9

Provoked to Tender Dreams By a Hint: the Contemporary Lesbian and Gay Historical Genre

If, as we've seen, retrospection has been a vital feature of homosexual self-definition for at least the past hundred years, then since the emergence of the visible, vocal gay communities of the post-Stonewall era, lesbians' and gay men's preoccupation with their own history has only intensified. With the dawn of what Kenneth Plummer has termed the "Golden Age" of gay studies, the tradition of historical speculation maintained by homosexual authors from Symonds to Renault has at last achieved academic respectability.¹ In literature, too - in the work of well-respected novelists like Robin Maugham, Alan Hollinghurst, Peter Ackroyd and Jeanette Winterson - history and historiographical practice have been subjected to a variety of peculiarly gay rereadings and retellings.

Accompanying and, at times, intersecting with these mainstream academic and literary developments have been changes in homosexual popular culture, a phenomenon which has been the subject of attentive but by no means exhaustive interest within gay studies itself. One important but inexplicably neglected product of the explosion of women's and gay men's publishing in the 1970s and '80s is the lesbian and gay historical genre. Like all literary genres, the new corpus of gay historical fiction is characterised by certain narrative tendencies and marketing styles, and dominated by authors who, if their names are less celebrated than those of their more mainstream counterparts, nevertheless command a dedicated readership. They include Sarah Aldridge, with a string

¹ Ken Plummer, 'Speaking its name: Inventing a lesbian and gay studies', in Plummer (ed.), *Modern Homosexualities: Fragments of Lesbian and Gay Experience* (London and New York, 1992), pp.3-25, p.3.

of historical titles to her name; Chris Hunt, a woman writer of gay men's fiction (whose sex her publishers, GMP, are keen to conceal²); Penny Hayes, an indefatigable producer of lesbian westerns; and Don Harrison, author of several gay romances set in ancient Greece. Also influential have been those writers - Ellen Galford, Caeia March, Neil Bartlett and others - whose work, while not always strictly historical, nevertheless consistently engages with gay historiographical issues; as well as those - for example, Isabel Miller, author of the pioneering *Patience and Sarah* (1969) - who have produced one major, influential historical text.

Though the growth of the lesbian and gay historical novel has been contemporary with that of the more academic forms of gay historiography, the precise nature of their relationship has never been quite resolved. Many of the genre's writers present themselves, or are offered by their publishers, as historians *manqués* - history 'buffs' or enthusiasts. Many attach 'historical notes' to their texts, detailing their sources and defending their interpretations; their work is, in turn, marketed on the strength of its historical accuracy, as 'revealing' or 'well-researched'. Hunt's *Thornapple* (1989), for example, is, according to its GMP publishers, "a rich and imaginative tapestry of people and places [which brings] the early 13th century vividly to life";³ Penny Hayes' *Montana Feathers* (1990), a Naiad publication, is "a novel of such astonishing authenticity that you will vividly experience what it is like [...] to be among strong women in a huge land on America's frontier in the late 1800's"; Vincent Virga's *Gaywyck* (1980) "gives us rare glimpses of what gay men were possibly doing and saying eighty years ago".⁴

However, such novels' historiographical pretensions appear to be undermined by their very obvious engagement with genre itself. If the reverses of lesbian and gay historical novels allege their intimacy with history, their front-cover illustrations - which invariably depict pairs of period-dressed same-sex lovers (see figure 5) - betray all their debts to fantasy and romance. Their proximity to the abject historical genre has, indeed, worked to exclude them from academic consideration. As a contribution to historical

² As Gregory Woods points out, Hunt's novels are all carefully marketed - with cleverly edited review quotations, etc - to imply that their author is male. See his review of *N for Narcissus* in *Rouge*, 5 (Winter 1990/1), p. 42.

³ Chris Hunt, *Thornapple* (London, 1989), publishing blurb. Page references will be included in the text.

⁴ Publishing blurb from: Penny Hayes, *Montana Feathers* (Tallahassee, 1990); Vincent Virga, *Gaywyck* (London, 1987).

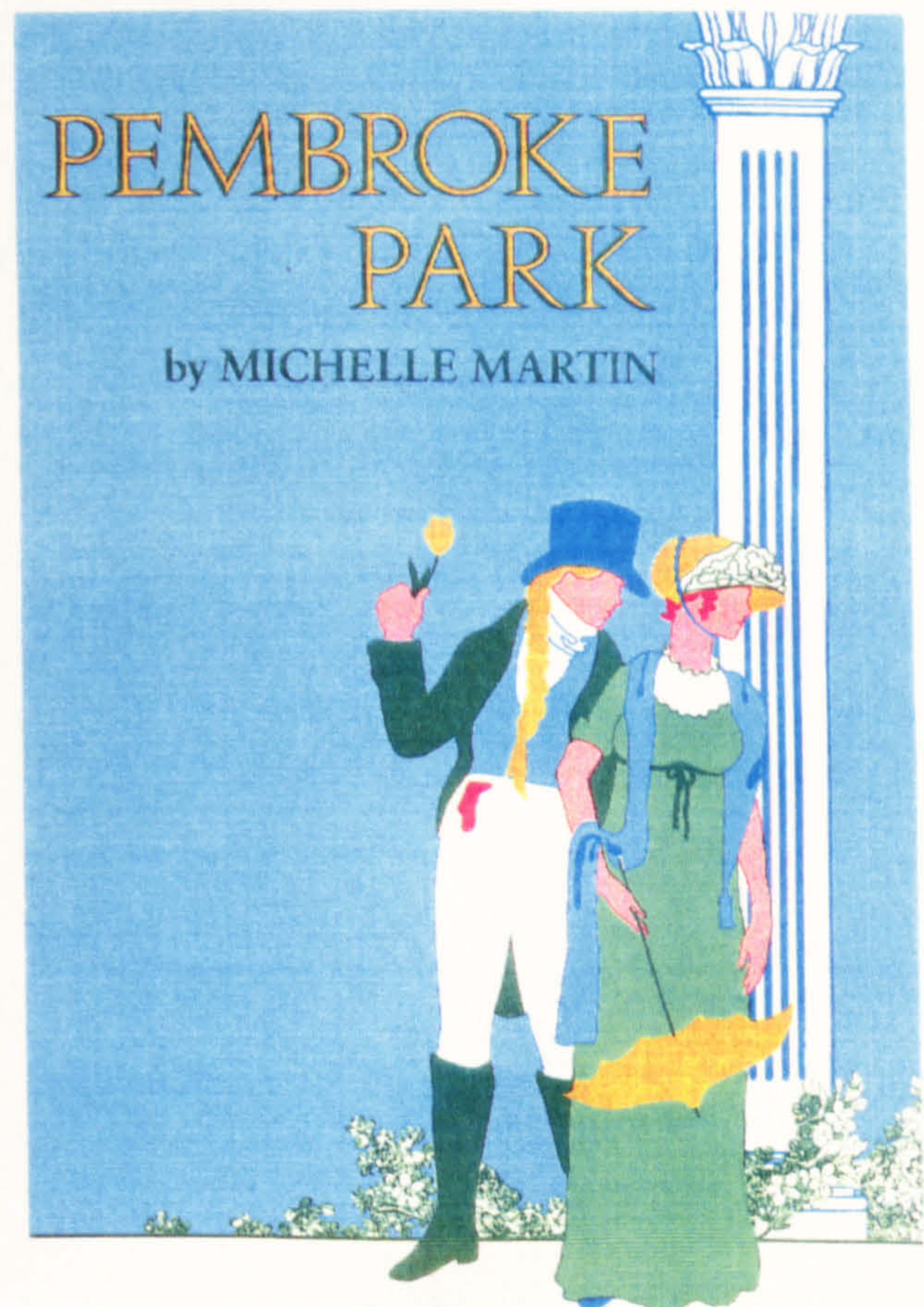
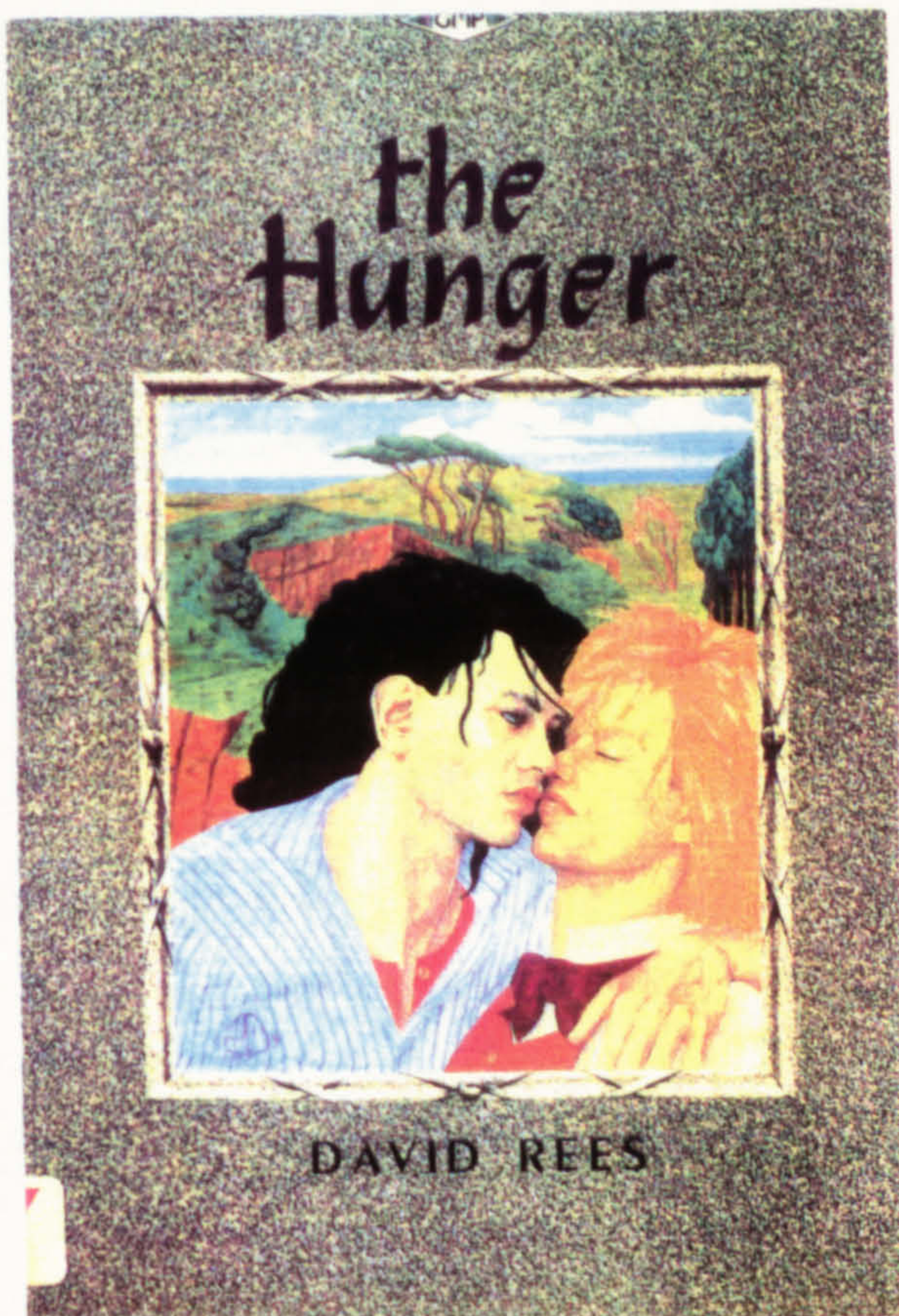
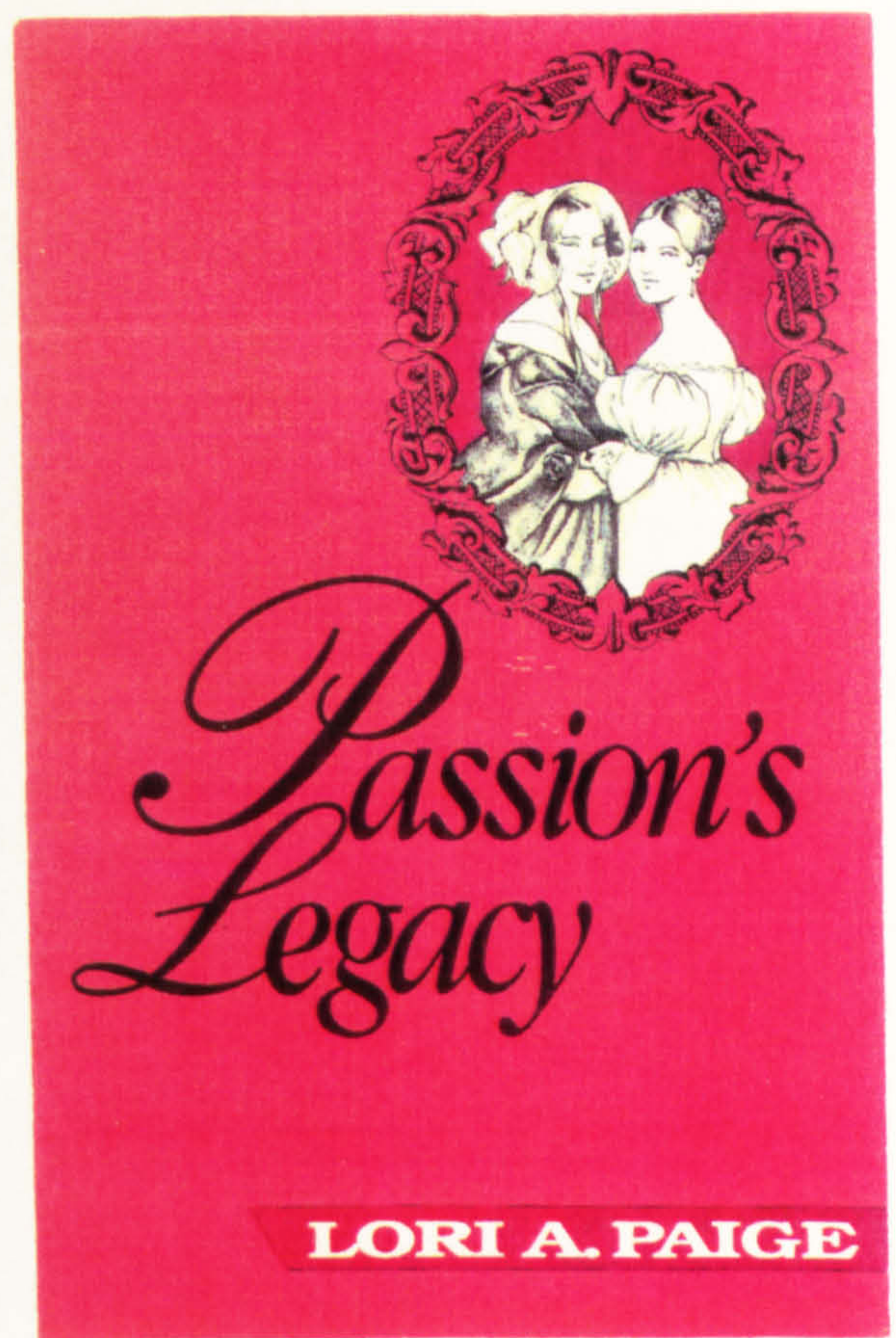
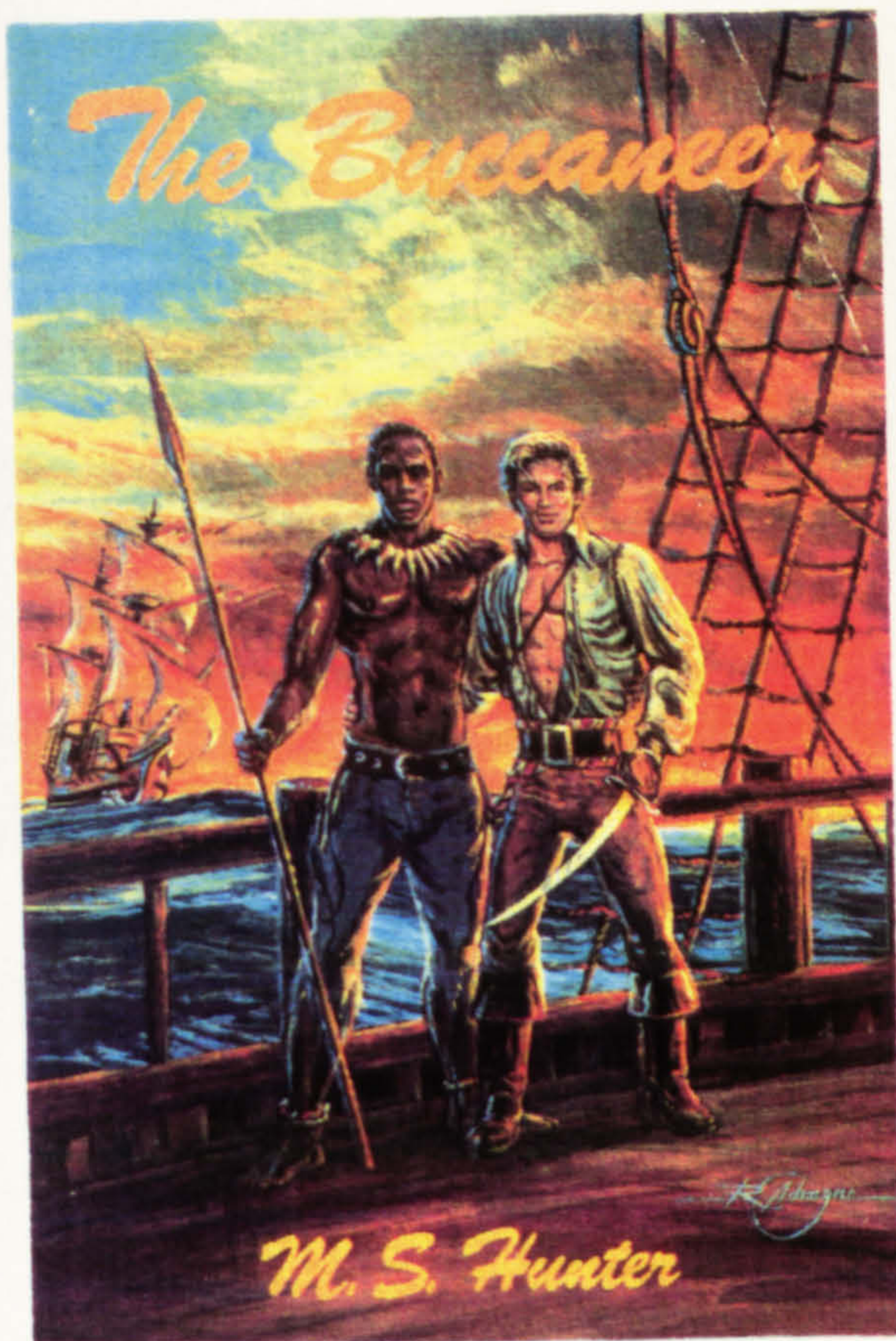


Figure 5: *The Buccaneer* (1989: Alyson Publications), *Passion's Legacy* (1991: Naiad Press), *The Hunger* (1986: GMP), *Pembroke Park* (1986: Naiad Press)

knowledge the lesbian and gay historical novel has at best been overlooked, at worst greeted with embarrassment or derision. As a gay genre it has failed to charm even the most adventurous of critics; those who have considered it have been impatient with what they understand to be the implausibility of its sexual narratives and the lowness of its appeal. James Levin, for example, in *The Gay Novel in America*, calls Mark Hamilton's 1983 *My Brother's Image* "a ludicrous historical romance".⁵ Robert Aldrich takes exception to the "arrogant, pouting slut" Ganymede has become in Felice Picano's *An Asian Minor* (1981): "the story makes no attempt at historical accuracy", he complains, "and the ridiculous illustrations turn his lovers into mustachioed disco clones".⁶ Patricia Duncker, in her study of contemporary feminist fiction *Sisters and Strangers*, is suspicious of feminist genre fiction in general and lesbian historical romances in particular. "The women who write romances are rarely historians," she notes, "which means that we are given a very conventional pasteboard version of history. In Galford's comic picaresque [*Moll Cutpurse* (1986)], all the clichés have walk-on parts".⁷ Such comments identify what are apparently insurmountable obstacles between lesbian and gay historical fiction and serious academic discussion. The Cinderella of gay and feminist criticism, the genre has been left apparently languishing in the scullery of popular consumption while its brasher step-sisters - the lesbian science fiction novel and the gay thriller - have been welcomed into the ballroom of progressive literary enquiry.⁸

I aim in this chapter to remedy the long-standing neglect of contemporary lesbian and gay historical fiction, by looking to the genre not, as critics have tended to look, for

⁵ James Levin, *The Gay Novel in America* (New York and London, 1991), p. 338.

⁶ Robert Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean: Writing, art and homosexual fantasy* (London and New York), p. 192.

⁷ Patricia Duncker, *Sisters and Strangers* (Oxford, 1992), p. 123.

⁸ Recent collections to include work on lesbian (usually lesbian) and/or gay genre fiction - for example, the science fiction novel, the detective story, the vampire story - include Susannah Radstone's *Sweet Dreams: Sexuality, Gender and Popular Fiction* (London, 1988); Helen Carr's *From My Guy to Sci-Fi: Genre and Women's Writing in the Postmodern World* (London, 1989); Elaine Hobby and Chris White's *What Lesbians do in Books* (London, 1991); Sally Munt's *New Lesbian Criticism: Literary and Cultural Readings* (Hemel Hempstead, 1992) and Gabrielle Griffin's *Outwrite: Lesbianism and Popular Culture* (London, 1993). None of these discuss the lesbian or gay historical genre. Anne Cranny-Francis devotes no space to lesbian historical fiction in her *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (London, 1990) - indeed, she does not even recognise the historical novel, lesbian or otherwise, as a generic category. Paulina Palmer, in her *Contemporary Lesbian Writing: Dreams, desires, difference* (Buckingham and Bristol PA, 1993), discusses a few lesbian historicals but - though she examines the lesbian comic novel, Coming Out novel, crime novel, fantasy and romance - similarly does not identify a distinct lesbian historical genre.

historical *accuracy*, but in an exploration of its status and meanings as, precisely, historical *fantasy*: as in earlier chapters, I shall be suggesting that historical fiction might be most fruitfully read as a register of the homosexual self-image, an index to the myths of origins with which gay communities represent and explain themselves. This self-image, these myths, are, of course, far from seamless; they are perhaps most noticeably fractured, as gay experience itself is fractured, along lines of race and gender. I noted the conspicuous absence of a black lesbian and gay historical genre in my Introduction, and shall return to it later; this chapter looks largely at the historical fictions of white lesbians and gay men, and attempts, amongst other things, to expound and explain the differences between them.

For while gay men and lesbians have often been united in their search for historical precedent, the histories they have recovered, the models they have found, have frequently been very different indeed. Consider the titles of some recent anthologies. The women's equivalent of the National Lesbian and Gay Survey's collection of gay men's life stories - *Proust, Cole Porter, Michelangelo, Marc Almond and Me* - is entitled *What a Lesbian Looks Like*. The lesbian companion volume to the Hall Carpenter Archives' earlier anthology of gay autobiographies, *Walking After Midnight*, is called *Inventing Ourselves*. While the titles of the men's volumes gesture towards a history both of personalities and of behaviours, the women's appeal to neither tradition nor subculture, but evoke a lesbian identity which is current, possibly secret, and in a continual state of renegotiation.

This difference between the ways in which gay men and lesbians have presented their histories undoubtedly reflects some of the realities of modern homosexual experience; as Kenneth Barrow, founder of the National Lesbian and Gay Survey, generalizes, "a lesbian in coming to terms with her sexuality heads straight for the public libraries while her male counterpart heads straight for the public lavatories. Many women feel that they choose their lesbian sexuality; most men believe they have been gay since birth or early infancy".⁹ But it also, I would suggest, testifies to the gulf between lesbians' and gay men's historical *mythologies* - between the kinds of histories lesbians

⁹ Kenneth Barrow, Foreword to National Lesbian and Gay Survey, *Proust, Cole Porter, Michelangelo, Marc Almond and Me: Writings by Gay Men on their Lives and Lifestyles* (London and New York, 1993), p. vii.

and gay men have felt it possible and appropriate to acknowledge, recover or invent. The shape and nature of the lesbian and gay past has, in other words, been determined quite as much by the knowledges and expectations lesbians and gay men have brought to their projects, as by the quality of the material they have uncovered.

The historical mythologies informing the titles of those volumes of lesbian and gay autobiographies have also influenced fictional representations of the older gay past. Nor is their hold over gay fiction a new one: to compare the contemporary historical novels of gay men and lesbians is to uncover tensions first generated in the clash between the homosexual Hellenism of Symonds and Douglas, and the feminist lesbian retrospection of Vivien and Barney, at the turn of the century. While gay fiction continues to testify to a tradition of desires, behaviours and punishments, lesbian historiography has remained, like Vivien's, imaginative and empathic; while gay men's novels tend towards a recuperation of homosocial and homosexual icons and cultures, lesbians have continued to devote themselves to rescuing their isolated ancestors from the interstices of male history itself.

Recovering gay men's (hi)stories

As it has in earlier decades, the gay historical genre has intimate links with more academic forms of homosexual historiography, and both lesbian and gay men's fiction has been influenced by new historiographical tendencies - previously anticipated only, perhaps, in the work of Bryher - to look beneath or beyond the homosexual grand narratives, with their royal, aristocratic or monstrous protagonists. Where the homosexual historiographical impulse was once anthological, and sought simply to draw disparate but prestigious homosexual moments together (in the manner of say, Carpenter's *Ioläus*, Garde's *Jonathan to Gide*), contemporary lesbian and gay historians understand their relationship with traditional historical narrative to be a far more subversive one. *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Lesbian and Gay Past*; *Not A Passing Phase: Reclaiming Lesbians in History*: such titles figure lesbian and gay historiography as an urgent, utopian, politically-charged activity, which wrests the homosexual past *back* from a form of historical representation that is implicitly redefined as *misrepresentation*.

Taking historiography to task over its injustices to or occlusion of homosexual experience, and finding a space for intimacy between the gay past and the retrospective gay present, are the implicit projects of many gay historical novels: if gay historiography assumes that the past is full of homosexual stories, the historical genre assures us that history is full of homosexuals with stories *to tell*, stories most meaningful to their modern gay recipients. An enduring gay historical motif is that of the recovery of the secret book or 'lost diary', the hitherto forgotten or unpublishable homosexual testimony. An ancient literary device, the 'lost diary' formula has been applied to homosexual representation in particular since the 1950s (when, as we've seen, the homosexual exposé gained its first, broad currency): Christopher Short's *The Black Room* (1964), for example, consists of the fictionalised diaries of the homosexual German King Ludwig II - and an elucidating afterword by an 'editor'/analyst. In the hands of gay authors, the same motif has been employed to recover the homosexual voice and lend it historical authority, to represent the evasion or defiance of heterosexual suppression and the exposure of other, non-traditional routes along which historical knowledge might be passed.

Robin Maugham's *The Last Encounter* (1972), for example, purports to be the lost journal of the Victorian military hero, General Gordon, and offers an account of the General's conflicting emotions at his unmistakable attraction to a young British envoy, Trooper Warren; Warren himself is the diary's preserver, his great-nephew its modern 'editor'. M. S. Hunter's 1989 *The Buccaneer*, too, claims to be a rediscovered homosexual manuscript - in this case, the blatantly fictional memoirs of a promiscuous seventeenth-century gay pirate, 'Tommy the Cutlass', whose sexual career mirrors that of its present-day transcriber. Other novels recover the gay stories which have been overshadowed by, or revealingly intersect with or unsettle, the grander historical narratives. Carter Wilson's *Treasures on Earth* (1981) retells archaeologist Hiram Bingham's 1911 discovery of Machu Picchu from the perspective of his photographer, Willie Hickler, who makes his own, homosexual, discoveries with the expedition's Peruvian guide. Chris Hunt's historical *oeuvre* is made up of a series of first-person gay narratives set in periods ranging from medieval England to nineteenth-century London; in *Gaveston* (1992), for example, Edward II gives his own account of his tragic romance and downfall (incidentally redressing the partialities of Margaret Campbell Barnes' *Isabel the Fair*).

Such novels seek to make historiography accountable to homosexual *desire*: the desiring body has remained historical fiction's privileged - perhaps its *only* real - homosexual signifier. Most contemporary gay historical novels are also romances, and work to flout, rather than to observe, the limits of specific homosexual discourses: the homosexual stories revealed by the 'lost diaries' - whatever their particular historical setting - are all rather similar. The gay historical romance thus operates very differently to Mary Renault's reconstructions of Greek Love (indeed, we might understand the raunchy Hellenism of a writer like Don Harrison, author of *The Spartan* [1982] and *The Lion Warriors* [1986], as a gay rewriting of Renault's own ambiguous *oeuvre*). When the genre invokes sexual labels - "mignon", "ingle";¹⁰ "Urning", "sodomite", "Mary Ann";¹¹ "matelot"¹² - it does so only, ultimately, to *reject* them in favour of a 'natural' homosexual identity which seems to take its authority from the imperatives of the flesh; sometimes, indeed, its desiring subjects have no access at all to a homosexual vocabulary. "'Are you... quite alone in the world?'" an Irish emigrant asks Michael Tangney in David Rees' novel set amidst the 1840s Potato Famine, *The Hunger* (1986).

'Yes. My... he... died of typhus. On the ship.'

'He?'

'There isn't a name like husband, because the world doesn't admit such things exist. But I was as married to him as any man and his wife to each other.'¹³

Here, desire asserts its precedence over (absent) discursive category - just as, of course, it contends for authority with historical specificity in the very title of Rees' novel: the *hunger* that is at once sexual and literal.

More often, however, the characters in gay historical romances face, not the traversal of uncharted sexual territory, but the negotiation of a complicated homosexual discursive landscape. John Ahern's *Brandy Wine* (1988) - a 'Gay Western' - opens with the rape of its young hero, the handsome Brand Linhope; Tommy the Cutlass' narrative in *The Buccaneer* begins, rather more felicitously, with the boast that "I was thirteen years old when first I felt a man's hand slipping inside my pantaloons and exploring

¹⁰ Chris Hunt, *Mignon* (London, 1987).

¹¹ Chris Hunt, *Street Lavender* (London, 1986).

¹² M. S. Hunter, *The Buccaneer* (Boston, 1989).

¹³ David Rees, *The Hunger* (London, 1986), p. 187.

secret places. I loved it".¹⁴ Both Brand and Tommy have to make their own way in a world which offers them a range of homosexual acts, meanings and identifications; both find ultimate happiness with male partners in rudimentary homosexual communities (the former in the 'Yerba Buena' - San Francisco - of the 1840s, the latter on the imaginary island of San Vito, in which his future 'editor', 'Hunter' himself, lives with a male lover in his own gay idyll). Like theirs, the journey made by Willie Smith in Hunt's *Street Lavender* (1986) is also a search for homosexual integrity - in his case, a quest to recover the uncomplicated sexual bonding he first enjoyed, as a boy, with his butch brother Charley. Different discourses - juridical, sexological, Hellenist - name, but do not (as in Foucauldian theory) *construct* this quest - if anything, they *obstruct* it. Willie's sexual career ends where it began, far from the 'public' arena of erotic categorisation, in a nocturnal embrace:

We lay close and warm, whispering tender words. The future, with all its joys and sorrows, was not much in our thoughts that night; only the present, where all we had ever dared hope for had become a sweet reality at last.¹⁵

Other gay historical novels - *Brandy Wine*, Virga's *Gaywyck* - end on a similar embrace, establishing their lovers in an eternal present in which past tensions are resolved, and future complications endlessly deferred. Such an image is, indeed, an appealing, and enduring, one in gay and lesbian culture: think of the final scenes in *The Green Scamander* and *Maurice*; consider the conclusion of *Philip and Gerald*, Edward Stevenson's early gay romance, which has its heroes "walking forward, calmly and joyfully, and in an unlessened affection and clearer mutual understanding - into their endless lives".¹⁶

¹⁴ Hunter, *The Buccaneer*, p. 11.

¹⁵ Hunt, *Street Lavender*, p. 343. Further references, where obvious, will be included in the text.

¹⁶ Edward Irenæus Stevenson, *Philip and Gerald or Left to Themselves* (London, 1893; first published 1891), pp. 322-3.

'By Zeus, those were the days': history, fiction, and 'historiographic metafiction'

As I suggested in my Introduction, we should not downplay the value of gay literature's transhistorical romantic fantasies; neither, however, should we misunderstand the historical genre's proximity to fantasy to mean that its effects are merely consolatory. It is, I would suggest, in the very persistence with which so many historical novels assert their own tendencies towards fantasy, romance and pornography that the genre's historiographical subtleties lie. As should have become obvious by now, most gay historical novels are generic not just in the sense that they belong to a lesbian and gay genre, but in as much as they appropriate and parodically revise various formulas from the historical novel genre as it has been established within heterosexual conventions. The blurb on the back cover of *The Buccaneer*, for example, begins "Shiver Me Timbers!", and invites us to "Forget all those pirate movies where the handsome captain rescues the maiden... *real* pirates were often more interested in one another". Don Harrison's *The Lion Warriors* is fondly dedicated to

all those Italian sword and sandal epics and to all those hunks who struggled so mightily; Kirk Morris, Richard Harrison, Gordon Scott, Jack Sernas, Rory Calhoun, Henri Vidal, and Steve Reeves, the best *Herakles* of them all. What a wonderful place the ancient world must have been, I thought, to have been populated by such brawny beefcake. By Zeus, those were the days.¹⁷

Clearly, even while such novels appear to offer themselves as historical reconstructions, what they are actually reconstructing is not *history* at all, but, rather, *narratives of history* - the pirate movie, the western, the romance, even the 'Mary Renault' novel - already in cultural circulation. Such a distinction - and the persistence with which it is foregrounded by many gay novels themselves - is crucial. It effectively *removes* the genre from the realms of historical fiction and places it within the bounds of what Linda Hutcheon has termed 'historiographic metafiction', a postmodernist form in which "there are overt attempts to point to the past as already 'semiotized' or encoded, that is, already inscribed in discourse and therefore 'always already' interpreted".¹⁸ Utilised for a

¹⁷ Don Harrison, *The Lion Warriors*, (Boston, 1986).

¹⁸ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (New York and London, 1988), pp. 96-7. Further references will be included in the text.

specifically gay agenda, historiographic metafictional techniques expose the provisionality of (historical) representation, lay bare its implication in dominant - heterosexual - social structures which are in turn revealed to be far from stable.

With Hutcheon's model in mind, then, we might redefine the 'pasteboard' quality of the history in many gay novels as an indulgence of representational formula, *as* formula: an appropriation of narrative codes which, like the "replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames" that is, in Judith Butler's analysis, butch-femme role-playing, only "brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called [...] original".¹⁹ Hunter and Harrison's generic revisions are overt, but even the apparently least playful of gay historical novels flaunt their intertexts. *Street Lavender*, for instance, continually and ironically foregrounds its own narrative models - romance, for example, and melodrama ("our father died of a fever," it begins, "and we fell Upon Hard Times" [7]) - and even appropriates the plots of some individual novels themselves - *Jane Eyre*, *Oliver Twist* - in the process. The effect of such ironic invocation is, to borrow Hutcheon's description of a rather different novel which employs a similar technique (Doctorow's *Loon Lake*), "both literary and historical: the novel actually enacts the realization that what we 'know' of the past derives from the discourses of that past. This is not documentary realism: it is a novel about our cultural representations of the past" (136).

Gay historicals frequently not only accentuate the processes of cultural representation, but unsettle them with active, protesting or ironic interventions; indeed, as texts like *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* and *The Green Scamander* reveal, while historiographical metafiction may be a distinctly postmodernist form, the plundering and selective rewriting of historical narrative is something at which lesbians and gays have always been particularly adept. Like Wilde and Meagher, many modern novelists - Humphrey Richardson in *The Secret Life of Robinson Crusoe* (1962), for example, Francis King in *Danny Hill* (1977) - have unearthed homosexual subtexts from within single, canonical fictions: the 'lost diaries' of homosexual history have frequently been flagrantly counterfeit ones.

Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, for example, have been subjected to no

¹⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London, 1990), p. 31.

less than three gay rewritings, each of which claims to be the secret homosexual testimony of Dr Watson. "You always suspected Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson were more than just good friends, didn't you?", cajoles Larry Townsend's *The Sexual Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1971):

Well, here at last is the long-suppressed COMPLETE, UNEXPURGATED story of the world's greatest detective, only recently brought to light from the secret archives at 221B Baker Street. Doctor Watson, it transpired, kept two sets of books: one for contemporary publication, the other presented here for the first time, telling it the way it REALLY was! Elementary - my dear Watson!²⁰

Townsend's pornographic text is also, however, a sophisticated parody, in which the homosocial conventions of Conan Doyle's stories are translated into the signifiers of modern gay culture. In it, Holmes and Watson are, of course, gay (and lovers) - as, in fact, is every character Townsend borrows from the Doyle originals: Gregson and Lestrade (the Scotland Yard detectives), Holmes' brother Mycroft, his arch-rival Professor Moriarty, even 'Mrs Hudson', his redoubtable housekeeper. Similarly, the cases which Holmes and Watson investigate - 'A Study in Lavender Lace' and 'The Queer Affair of the Greek Interpreter' (both corruptions of actual Conan Doyle stories) - hinge upon homosexual intrigues. One, not inconsiderable, effect of Townsend's text is, of course, to ensure that we never read the Conan Doyle originals in the same way again - an achievement we might, following Harriett Hawkins in *Classics and Trash*, wish to celebrate as an example of those "conscious fusions and unconscious confusions" of 'high' and 'low' art forms that pervade multi-media cultures.²¹

Like Townsend, Rohase Piercy offers his *My Dearest Holmes* (1988) as the definitive account that will clear up all the "glaring loopholes" in the Doctor's published memoirs²² - thus effectively opening up a space beneath Holmes' apparently seamless expositions for a repressed homosexual undertext. Piercy's homosexual Watson has a lesbian wife who, like him, appreciates the heterosexual camouflage their marriage of

²⁰ Publishing blurb: J. Watson [pseud. Larry Townsend], *The Sexual Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (New York, 1971).

²¹ Harriett Hawkins, *Classics and Trash: Traditions and Taboos in High Literature and Popular Modern Genres* (Hemel Hempstead, 1990), p. 4.

²² Rohase Piercy, *My Dearest Holmes: A recently discovered memoir by John H. Watson, M.D.* (London, 1988), p. 77. Further references will be included in the text.

convenience provides: here, fictional events are overshadowed by changes in the cultural climate, as the Labouchère Amendment is brought into force; Holmes' case, appropriately enough, hinges on a blackmail attempt. Watson's romance with the detective, satisfied after a series of evasions and misunderstandings, is conducted - so a 'Postscript' informs us - under the guise of their old, professional relationship; it provides Watson with "the happiest [years] of my life, in spite of the tragic and dangerous public events which occurred in the literary world a couple of years later", which "cast a long shadow across the social and political landscape" (142). If Townsend's novel parodically dissolves the boundary between the Victorian homosocial and the contemporary gay, Piercy's reminds us that the homosocial/homosexual distinction was already, in *fin-de-siècle* culture, under attack.

The *implication* of Holmes and Watson in the changing landscape of Victorian homosexual definition is further explored in Russell A. Brown's *Sherlock Holmes and the Mysterious Friend of Oscar Wilde* (also 1988). Once again, the novel is introduced by an 'editor's' note detailing the discovery of the subsequent narrative, offering arguments for and against its authenticity, and defending the decision to make it known to the public; as in Townsend's *Sexual Adventures*, however, the first chapter - "Unnatural Intrusions" - undercuts the claim to authenticity by foregrounding the text's status as gay parody: "Queer people sought help from Sherlock Holmes, but the queerest of all arrived one morning in the spring of 1895".²³ The queerest of all queer persons is, of course, Wilde himself, who seeks Holmes' assistance in solving yet another homosexual blackmail case. Unlike Townsend's and Piercy's heroes, Brown's Holmes and Watson are, far from being lovers, virulently homophobic, and must be schooled by Wilde in the manners of the thriving homosexual subculture; the plot hinges not upon their romance, but upon their vulnerability to legal and medical scrutiny now that the signifiers of deviance are being redrawn. "[N]ow *you* are in danger", a gay brothel-keeper warns them.

'I'm sure some at Scotland Yard will be eager to destroy you on grounds of Morality - a weapon people often use against those they personally dislike. And the public! They will pick you over like one monkey picking fleas off another. "Does Holmes prefer effete pleasures rather than manly recreations? Are young people ever seen entering his

²³ Russell A. Brown, *Sherlock Holmes and the Mysterious Friend of Oscar Wilde* (New York, 1988), p. 1. Further references will be included in the text.

lodgings? Does he ever dress in women's costume?" I started. [Holmes sometimes employed the services of a group of street urchins, and occasionally donned female disguise.] 'I see I struck home on that. "Is he married?" "No." "Does he pursue female companionship?" "No." "With whom does he spend his time?" "A bachelor friend, with whom he lives." "Hah!"' (137)

Such moments (which incidentally make a gloss on the novel's own genre as well as Conan Doyle's, exposing precisely those definitional shifts which have rendered the classic homosocial narratives of the last century, with their comradely platitudes - *Dearest Holmes, My Dear Watson* - available for gay appropriation) open up to the supposed master-detective a whole new field of homosexual 'knowledge'; like Piercy's novel, it is to the exclusions and suppressions of Victorian positivism - and, by implication, of 'classic realism', both as a literary and a historiographical technique - that Brown's draws attention.²⁴ In this, inverted, detective story, it is Wilde himself who persists in identifying villainy - not in the form of the misdeeds of a 'criminal minority' (a concept, like 'homosexual', newly emergent in the *fin de siècle*), but in the broader outrages of bourgeois English culture itself. To Watson's fatuous claim that the Family is "the foundation of national life", for example, he replies with a reminder of "the deeds of hellish cruelty, the hidden wickedness which may go on, year in and year out, within each one, and none the wiser" (23-4); to the Doctor's defence of the prosecution of homosexual indecency, he points out that the Amendment Act was initially "directed towards men whose sexual appetite for little *girls* gave rise to a flourishing white-slave trade" (30); and to Holmes' observation that Watson will be unable to include their homosexual case in his published memoirs, he concurs that "Some facts may have to be suppressed, but that is usual when people write about my kind: They think their only duty to history is to rewrite it" (151).

It is, indeed, to history's susceptibility to revision - a revision that might be heterosexual and occlusive, but also *homosexual*, parodic and subversive - that the gay historical genre ultimately directs us. Brown's novel, which combines Wildean *mot* and Doylean narrative formula, suggests that real historical figures are as appropriable yet

²⁴ Not coincidentally, I think, Catherine Belsey cites Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories as exemplary 'classic realist' texts - texts which obscure their own ideological allegiances by offering themselves as transparent or 'common-sense' reconstructions of a 'simulated reality'. Belsey, too, is interested in all that the stories 'repress': see her *Critical Practice* (London, and New York, 1990), pp. 109-117.

insubstantial as imaginary ones, in as much as our access to both is always, necessarily, *textual*; it, like many gay historicals (Hunt's *N for Narcissus* [1990], for example, invokes a range of specifically gay intertexts, including *Teleny* and *Maurice*), offers itself as both history and homosexual myth. In a similar way, perhaps, Neil Bartlett's *Who Was That Man?: A Present for Mr Oscar Wilde* (1988) - like Isaac Julien's filmic meditation on the life of Langston Hughes, *Looking for Langston* (1988) - testifies to the impossibility of gay culture's ever really 'knowing' or 'finding' its ancestors, even while indulging the fantasy in which historian and historical subject are brought together in sexual collusion. Bartlett foregrounds his own status as gay fantasist, his own role in the *invention* of his gay heritage: alongside his impressive and important recovery of the homosexual codes and mores of *fin-de-siècle* culture, he offers himself, "[writing] this book in London in 1985 and 1986",²⁵ leafing through the catalogue in the British Library reading room, retreading the lost paths of older men's sexual adventures, "making it up" (30).²⁶

Like *Who Was That Man?*, the gay historical genre leads its readers back, subtly but persistently, to their own historical fantasising; for, like the Symonds, Raffalovich and Stevenson - and, of course, the Wilde - of Bartlett's biography, many of the characters in gay historical novels are often, themselves, captured in the act of homosexual retrospection. The romance of Don Harrison's *The Alexandrian Drachma* (1984), for example, is played out against a backdrop of Victorian Hellenist fantasy. Like Ulrichs and Symonds, its aristocratic English narrator falls in love at an early age with the statue of an ancient Greek ephebe; when, later, real youths - in particular, his handsome ward Alex - begin to take its place in his erotic fantasies, he experiences his sexuality as a form of cultural estrangement: "There was nothing about the modern age with its rigid credos of ceremony and custom that I liked at all. [...] I was a pagan, and I knew I could love only men".²⁷ His relationship with Alex places him quite literally in a homosexual cultural continuum: touring Egypt, the two lovers follow in Hadrian's footsteps to Antinoöpolis, fantastically assume the identities of Hephaistion and Alexander, and are welcomed into

²⁵ Neil Bartlett, *Who Was That Man? A Present for Mr Oscar Wilde* (London, 1988), p. xix. Further references will be included in the text.

²⁶ For more on the historiography of *Who Was That Man?* - and of Alan Hollinghurst's *The Swimming Pool Library*, which was published in the same year - see Joseph Bristow, 'On Being Gay: Politics, Identity, Pleasure', *New Formations*, 9 (Winter 1989), pp. 61-81.

²⁷ Don Harrison, *The Alexandrian Drachma* (Stamford, 1984), p. 28.

the delights of Greek Love by Father Zeus himself.

Such novels testify to the enduring appeal of historical speculation in homosexual culture; others comment more explicitly on both the strength and the provisionality of the historiographic tradition, and hint at their own place in it. Hunt's novels, in particular, are full of gay *storytellers*; Willie Smith, for example, weaves an endless series of erotic fantasies around his cousin Georgey, effortlessly appropriating and revising established narrative paradigms:

I lie in bed and concentrate. Close to, his hair is shiny gold, a little curl touches his cheek. His cheek is hot and soft, his neck is small. Quickly I transfer him to a different setting. A turretted castle and I am its lord. My courtiers bring in Georgey in a long blue cloak, daisy chains in his hair. When I lift back the cloak he is Quite Naked. (91-2)

That night I lie in bed imagining. I find myself separated from my Roundhead troop. The moon, high in a pitch-black sky, illumines the old manor house, a Cavalier stronghold. I climb the wall, I sprint across the flower beds crushing petals beneath my leather boots. With the speed of light I climb the ivy and I'm in through the mullioned window. I tear aside the curtains, and drop into the room. In a four-poster bed a Cavalier lad lies asleep. Ha! Just the sort I like! Georgey! (101)

Willie's fantasies, with their precise and economical invocation of period detail - turrets, cloaks, leather boots, mullions and four-poster beds - and inexorable slide into pornography, constitute an ironic commentary upon Hunt's own historical project. Similarly *Thornapple*, set in medieval England and France, is preoccupied with the processes and shifting priorities of nostalgia - both nationalist nostalgia (its pedlar narrator is, like some of Bryher's heroes, a Saxon chafing under Norman rule), and a specifically homosexual retrospective yearning: "ah! were they lovers in the carnal sense?" asks Roger, a renegade monk, at Roncesvalles, musing over the story of Oliver and Roland. "If only we could know!" (180). His frustration at the absence of verifiable homoerotic precedent (earlier he meets Blondel in a French tavern, and asks him - in vain - "'Did you ever fuck the king?'" [153]) is shared by other characters; they, however, have their own historiographical strategies, which once again resemble those of the gay historical novelist: "'[Y]ou won't find any tales about Aucassin and Nicholas, or Lancelot and Gawain,'" complains the pedlar to a fellow traveller. "'Even though there always have been lads who love each other, and always will be.' 'Then we have to tell our own,' smiled Wulfstan like a plotter" (87-8). It is precisely in such conspicuous plottings and

counterplottings that the pleasures of the gay historical novel lie. We might think of the history on offer in the genre less as the 'queer' history for which critics have looked to it, with inevitable disappointment, than what Scott Bravmann has termed "*queered* history": a history which "takes issue with historiography itself".²⁸

'Whatever this was I would live it': lesbian historical fantasy

If the impulse to create both a new historical and a new *historiographical* model has been a vital one in homosexual culture as a whole, it has had a particular urgency for lesbian commentators, who have understood themselves to be working without even those few historical models available to gay men (ironically guaranteed archival resource by, if nothing else, homophobic legislation). For Isabel Miller, author of the classic, influential historical novel, *Patience and Sarah*, lesbian *imagining* was both a subject and a project. Originally issued in 1969 as *A Place For Us*, the novel addresses precisely the problems of establishing a *space* for lesbian romance; such space, it suggests, must be wrested from patriarchal culture, and may be maintained only at its periphery. Tellingly, the 1986 edition of the novel bears an illustrated cover which places its protagonists against vast, rolling, rural landscapes (figure 6): Patience and Sarah are, the implication is, lesbian pioneers, heroic, ground-breaking, but necessarily isolated. Indeed, the novel, which is based loosely on the lives of early nineteenth-century American painter Mary Ann Willson and her romantic friend Miss Brundidge, fits into and revises a literal pioneer tradition: the frontier narrative.

Overcoming family opposition, its heroines leave their claustrophobic Connecticut town and set up home together, against all local precedent, in rural Greene County. Though the novel acknowledges the gay male cultural tradition, with Patience attempting an appropriation of Greek Love - "We can be Plato's perfect army", she reassures Sarah, "lovers, who will never behave dishonorably in each other's sight, and invincible"²⁹ -

²⁸ Scott Bravmann, 'Isaac Julien's *Looking For Langston*: Hughes, Biography and Queer(ed) History', *Cultural Studies*, 7 (2) (May 1993), pp. 311-23.

²⁹ Isabel Miller [pseud. Alma Routsong], *Patience and Sarah* (London, 1986), p. 101. Further references will be included in the text.

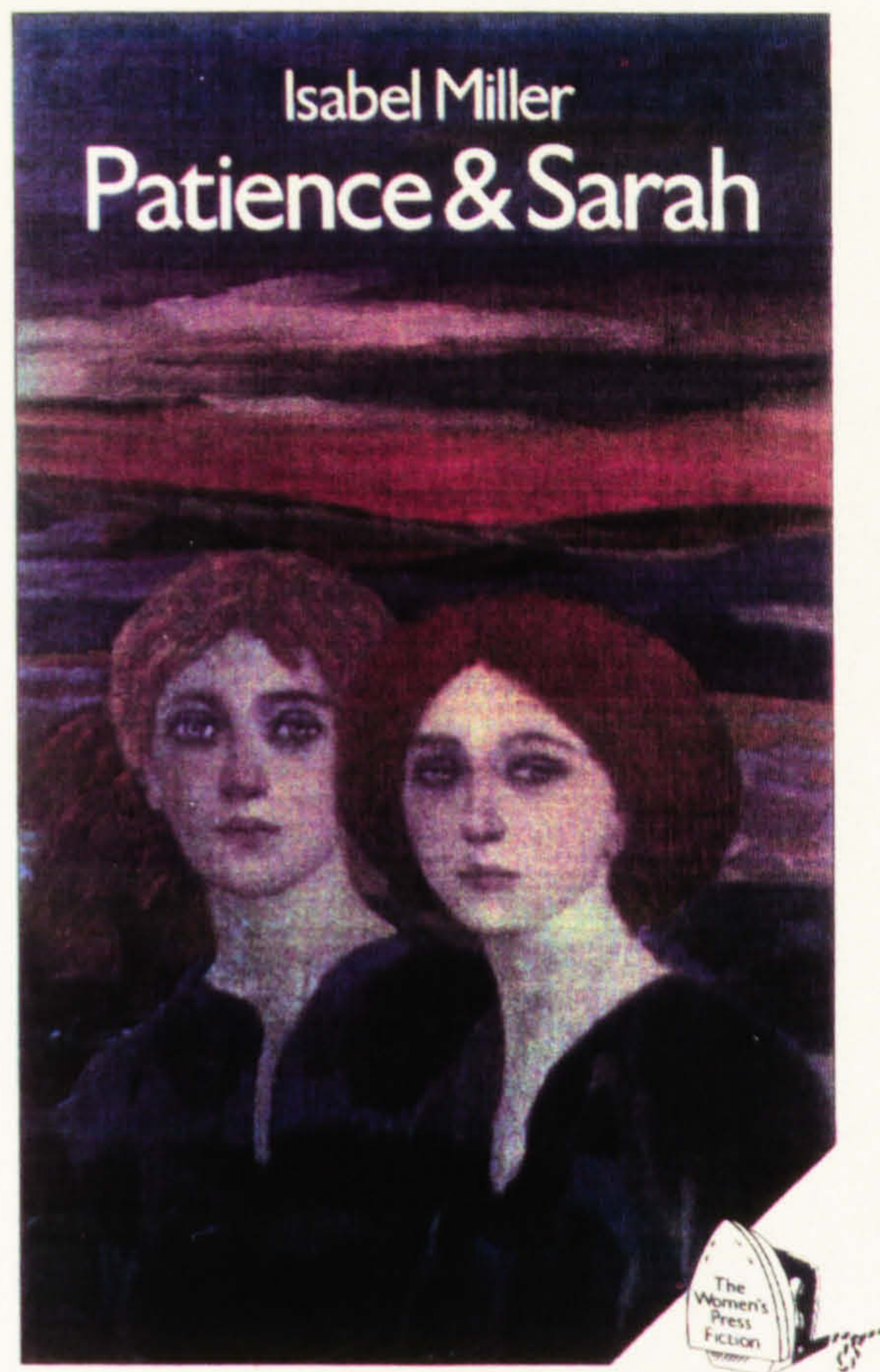


Figure 6: *Patience and Sarah* (1986: The Women's Press)

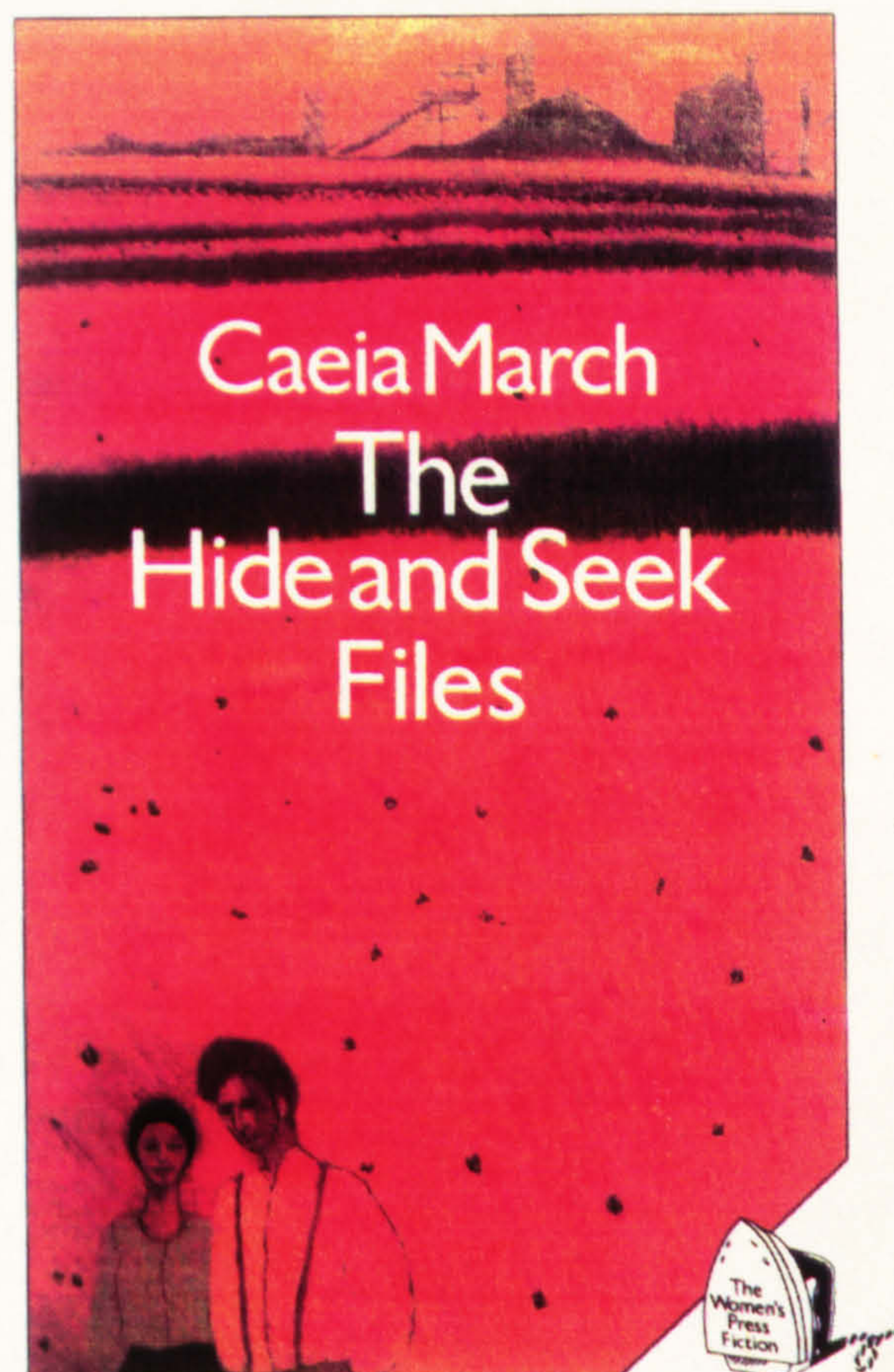


Figure 7: *The Hide and Seek Files* (1988: The Women's Press)

for the mechanics of lesbian partnership its heroines are without model:

I held Sarah's hand and we felt the ancient sea and the new wheels carry us to a life we had no pattern for, that no one we knew of had ever lived, that we must invent for ourselves on a razor's edge. (172)

Where for Willie Smith in *Street Lavender* the problem was one of *negotiating* sexual labels, for Patience and Sarah the issue is the *dearth* of discourse. They develop a private etiology of lesbian desire, formulate a proto-feminist analysis of the patriarchy, and invent their own erotic vocabulary: "wet", "waves", "melting". "[W]hatever this was", resolves Patience, "I would live it" (33).

Reissued in 1972 under its present title, *Patience and Sarah* became an extraordinary lesbian success and created a mould out of which subsequent lesbian fiction was unable, or unwilling, to break. We might see it as *the* (white) lesbian novel of origins: a text which not only heralded the explosion of lesbian writing and publishing from the 1970s onwards, but which seemed to give lesbians - conceptualised, once again, as the lesbian *couple* - the ancestry denied them by traditional, male-orientated historiography.³⁰ Miller's novel suggests a whole new way of visualising history, asserts that lesbians must, and can, reconstruct or intuit their own history from (in traditional historiographic terms) the most insignificant evidence. We "know our own response" to the story of Willson and Brundidge, Miller writes in an afterword to her novel; we "are provoked to tender dreams by a hint. Any stone from their hill is a crystal ball" (190). This is an appealing model, and does not obscure the role played by fantasy in the construction of lesbian history; indeed, it posits wishful thinking as a legitimate lesbian historiographical resource.

Like Miller, Jeannine Allard builds her lesbian romance *Légende* (1984) - which she, too, hopes will give us "dreams and visions, and courage to make them true"³¹ -

³⁰ Alma Routsong (i.e. Isabel Miller) recounts the difficulties she had in finding a publisher for *A Place For Us* in the late '60s in her interview with Jonathan Katz in his *Gay American History* (New York, 1992), pp. 433-43. Routsong brought out the first edition of the novel herself; it was not until 1972 that "the time had come" for mainstream publication of an upbeat lesbian novel. *Patience and Sarah* is thus a pioneer novel in more ways than one; as Barbara Grier points out, it "made the impossible journey from vanity publication to hardcover publication and cult status as a major Lesbian novel": *The Lesbian in Literature* (Tallahassee, 1981), p. 108.

³¹ Jeannine Allard, *Légende* (Boston, 1984), p. 10. Further references will be included in the text.

upon a 'hint', an obscure French legend telling of women lovers who lived as husband and wife in a nineteenth-century fishing community. "Légende" is an appropriate title, simultaneously gesturing towards the fragile or mythical status lesbianism must always have within the patriarchal 'given', and suggesting the *enduring* quality of the lesbian tradition. Indeed, the novel ends on an affirmation of a kind of lesbian continuum:

We are leaving behind a legend, all of us: because we have lived here, others will know that it has been done - others will dare to love and trust and feel as we did. For that I am grateful: and it will have to be enough, for that is all that I have.

And the world will go on. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.* (125)

As in Gordon's *Chase of the Wild Goose*, this is lesbian history *in the making*. If gay male writers have imagined their history as an unbroken chain of retrospective homosexual speculation, lesbians writers have recovered ancestors looking *forwards*, anticipating their own recuperation.

This kind of circular historiographic model is endorsed in other lesbian novels, in which *intuition* emerges along with wishful thinking as one of those resources with which women might bridge historiographical lacunae and make contact with their lesbian forebears. Jane Eisman's *Home Again, Home Again* (1990) opens with a prologue in which a present-day lesbian couple stumble across a suggestive gravestone in an obscure, disused cemetery, a gravestone set apart from the usual family plots and bearing the names of two women: Joan Rushton and Hannah Carston. While they speculate as to whether the women might have been lesbians, they are observed by the spirit of Joan Rushton herself, who - to the reader, at least - confirms their suspicions. Like Patience and Sarah, Joan and her lover set up house together in an era when such things were "simply 'not done'"³², and the main body of the novel tells their story. Its epilogue, however, returns us to the graveyard, to Joan's approving observation of the young lesbians' interest and, once again, to the reassurance of lesbian (romantic) tradition.

And now they have found us. Those two young women. The light-haired one, the one called Kate, is writing our names and dates in a small book; her journal perhaps. They turn to go, pleased.

³² Jane Eisman, *Home Again, Home Again* (Austin, 1990), p. 3. Further references will be included in the text.

I am pleased as well. We feel a bond with one another, across the years.
 But I wonder: Do you suppose they think they are the first ones to have found
 us? (139).

Such novels seem to endorse Judy Grahn's sense of the *continuity* of gay culture: a continuity that is "a result of characteristics that members teach each other so that the characteristics repeat era after era";³³ as in Mary Gordon's biography of the Ladies of Llangollen and Vivien's Sapphic poetry, it is through their very repetition of earlier sexual and political patterns that modern lesbians and gays are able to recognise, and become recognisable to, the same-sex lovers of other eras. Like gay men's fiction, the lesbian historical novel promises us that the past is full of homosexuals ripe for recuperation by sensitive historians; enacting the recuperative process itself, however - constructing a zone in which modern and ancient gay people can *commune* - has been a particular priority in lesbian fiction. The past decade has seen the emergence of a whole sub-genre of lesbian historical novels in which action takes place in both the present and the past, or moves between the two - a genre in which modern women become obsessed or even *possessed* by the restless lesbians of other eras. Such novels have no real gay male analogue; the nearest equivalent might be Harrison's *The Alexandrian Drachma*, in which, as we've seen, a handsome young Victorian aristocrat, on holiday in Egypt, discovers in himself a mysterious bond with Alexander the Great.

The historical models resurrected in lesbian fiction are (for reasons I shall consider later) usually far less illustrious; but, like Harrison's, these novels assure us that gay people's proper access to history must be by non-traditional historiographic routes: not just intuition, but mysticism or - as in *Chase of the Wild Goose* - spiritualism. Academic or professional history-writing skills emerge as either suspect (because compromised by elitist or patriarchal convention) or inappropriate to the material - those 'hints' - available. Maria, in Galford's *The Fires of Bride* (1986), makes contact with the ancient lesbian inhabitants of the island of Cailleach via a variety of disturbing supernatural means, including the ouija board; Susan, the heroine of Paula Martinac's *Out of Time* (1990), who becomes haunted by a group of lesbians from the 1920s when she finds an album of their photographs in an antique shop, also communicates with the past through a ouija

³³ Judy Grahn, *Another Mother Tongue: Gay Words, Gay Worlds* (Boston, 1984), p. xiv.

board, as well as via visions and dreams; Denny, in Caeia March's *Fire! Fire!* (1991), gives voice to the seventeenth-century Roarie Brewster through a form of automatic writing. All three of these novels also figure as allegories of female creativity. Just as earlier lesbian authors - Vivien, Michael Field - were enabled to write by their impassioned communings with Sapphic ancestors, so the heroines of these novels become empowered through their dealings with the past: all three end up producing artistic or literary works that let their own voices be heard, as well as those of their suppressed lesbian ancestors. Lesbian historiography emerges from such novels as an exemplary feminist practice - and also, sometimes, as an erotic encounter: in both *Out of Time* and *The Fires of Bride* ancient and modern sexual expectations are so similar that lesbian historian and lesbian revenant are able to become lovers.

Lesbian historiography, too, has alleged the transhistorical compatibility of women's political and erotic agendas. More vehemently even than gay male critics, lesbian historians have presented themselves as safeguarding a past that is unproblematically *theirs* - a lesbian past that does not just *prefigure* modern lesbianism, but which would have *been* modern lesbianism had it had the chance. Thus the passing women and passionate friends of other eras become *Those Who Would be Sisters*;³⁴ lesbian historians defend applying lesbian labels anachronistically on the grounds that "it is important to reveal and reclaim women's love for each other throughout history and to place ourselves as lesbians today in a line of descent from those women of all times who placed importance on their love for women";³⁵ Lillian Faderman, in her pioneering study of 'Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present', *Surpassing the Love of Men*, "venture[s] to guess that had the romantic friends of other eras lived today, many of them would have been lesbian-feminists".³⁶ As critics have pointed out, the pasts recovered by such historians, which appear so reassuringly to *anticipate* modern lesbian models, often simply *replicate* them.³⁷

³⁴ *For those who would be sisters: uncovering lesbian history*: Work in Progress Number 2 by students on the course 'Uncovering Lesbian History 1800-1970' 1985-86, Birkbeck College, University of London.

³⁵ Lesbian History Group, *Not A Passing Phase: Reclaiming Lesbians in History 1840-1985* (London, 1989), p. 14.

³⁶ Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men* (London, 1985), p. 20.

³⁷ See, for example, Chris White's attack on Faderman's 'Romantic Friendship' thesis in her "'Poets and Lovers evermore": the poetry and journals of Michael Field', in Joseph Bristow (ed.), *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing* (London and New York, 1992), pp. 26-43.

Supplying lesbian retrospection with its most crucial parameters, in fiction and non-fiction alike, has been lesbian feminism, a movement related to but historically quite distinct from the feminist lesbianisms of Vivien and Barney, Meagher and Gordon: one that was at its most assured in the late 1970s, and may already be on the wane. While many lesbian novels, like gay men's fiction, foreground their own generic affiliations, their proximity to romance, the shape of lesbian historical fantasy itself is, as we shall see, remarkably regular, the particular genres appropriated by lesbian historical novelists strikingly - and, I think, revealingly - consistent. While particular forms dominate, the crucial tendency of lesbian historical fantasy to *change*, as lesbian political priorities shift, is obscured. Miller's novel, as I have suggested, has proved to be an extremely influential, or symptomatic, one; yet in terms of the evolution of lesbian popular historiography throughout the century, *Patience and Sarah* is something of an anomaly. As we've seen, the historical figures to which lesbian fantasists of the past have looked for inspiration and explanation have been the *grandes dames* of women's history: Sappho, overwhelmingly, but also Queen Christina, Marie Antoinette, the Ladies of Llangollen, Penthesilia and Helen of Troy. Miller's historical models, however, are minor to the point of obscurity (and what's more, she resists using their names in her text, merely their example): rural, self-effacing, and - in her interpretation at least, though there is little evidence to suggest that their experience was any different to that of the many women who "routinely formed emotional ties with other women" in early American society³⁸ - opposed by others and *ingenuous* themselves. Of course, it is the very issue of historical underfunding that *Patience and Sarah* addresses; but I want to suggest that it also *exploits* that underfunding to produce a very particular lesbian model which it posits as a new, *appropriate* and somehow *natural* lesbian historical paradigm.

The (for)getting of wisdom: lesbian historical romances

Underpinning the lesbian historical genre is, clearly, a deep feminist mistrust of the

³⁸ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 'The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America', in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York, 1986), pp. 53-76, p. 53.

politics of iconicisation, an impulse to *democratise* history and its fictions. Perhaps the most striking absence in the modern lesbian historical genre is the Sapphic one. The only full-length novel with an ancient Lesbian setting - Ellen Frye's *The Other Sappho* (1989) - invokes the Sapphic grand narrative only, as its title suggests, to reject it. Frye resurrects the old academic controversy about the two Lesbian Sapphos to distinguish between two kinds of lesbianism: the celebrated Sappho of Mytilene - muse to generations of lesbian and feminist writers from Madame de Scudéry to Radclyffe Hall - emerges in her novel as a bourgeois feminist, content to compose commissioned epithalamia and civic verses for the heterosexual, hierarchical Lesbian society which has made her famous.

Frye's other Sappho is Lykaina, a crippled peasant girl - abandoned by her Spartan parents, raised initially by wolves and later sold into slavery - who represents the antithesis of the classical ideal. She has a natural gift for poetry, and for the music of the peasant instrument, the aulos; but in Sappho's gynaeceum she is encouraged to adopt the lyre, to reject the tradition of oral poetry, and to cultivate the manners of a lady. Happily, she has another mentor, the priestess Maia, who initiates her into the ancient worship of the Great Mother, and introduces her to a mystic feminine network that has managed to survive the aggressive rise of the Greek patriarchy. Ironically like Sappho herself in Catherine Dawson's nineteenth-century bourgeois feminist vision,³⁹ Lykaina establishes a radical Lesbian 'school', on the periphery of the island. Her fame spreads on the feminist underground and she attracts a group of peasant women poets - ex-slaves, ex-wives, unwilling brides-to-be - who together form a working lesbian community; their oral poetry celebrates female heroines, but will never achieve the lasting fame of Sappho's literature. Frye's novel constitutes a dissenting reply both to the homosexual Hellenism which found in ancient Greece a patriarchal urban ideal, and to the classic lesbian construction of Sapphism. Resurrecting Gaia, rather than Sappho, as the lesbian muse (in a reflection of, amongst other things, new ecological priorities), it testifies to gay culture's endless capacity for re-evaluating its own icons: Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love's enthusiasm for the Sapphic model notwithstanding, Frye's Sappho is definitely *not* a right-on woman.⁴⁰

³⁹ C. A. Dawson, *Sappho* (London, 1889): see chapter 4.

⁴⁰ Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love's 'Liberated View of Lesbianism', *Sappho Was a Right-On Woman* (New York, 1972), heralded a new, affirmative trend in the sociology of lesbianism.

The anxieties and preoccupations underpinning Frye's (anti)Sapphic fiction have had a shaping influence upon the lesbian historical genre as a whole - not just upon the historiographical practices the genre has described and employed, but, as I have suggested, upon the very 'history' it has 'recovered'. Like the gay historical novel, the genre traces a lesbian history that is basically romantic, a history of *couples*. But where the 'lost diaries' of gay men's fiction lead us into homosexual coteries and subcultures - a favourite setting is the *fin de siècle*, a favourite icon, Oscar Wilde - lesbian authors offer us non-urban, *early* nineteenth-century heroines who must, like Patience and Sarah, make their own, difficult way into long-term romance, without precedent, and against social and familial expectation. Typically, the lesbian historical novel is also either a frontier narrative or a western, or - if its setting is English rather than American - a Regency or gothic romance. Dominating the former genre is Penny Hayes' substantial historical *oeuvre* (most definitively, perhaps, the early *The Long Trail* [1986]); similar novels include Anne Cameron's *The Journey* (1986) and *Escape to Beulah* (1990). As their titles suggest, these novels present lesbianism as an odyssey or quest - more precisely, as the *reward* for feminist enterprise. The heroines of *The Long Trail*, for example, drawn to one another by a desire they do not understand, discover lesbian passion on the perilous three thousand-mile journey from their claustrophobic Texas town to the more hospitable New York State:

Blanche stood to face Teresa, her near six feet towering over the tiny woman. They both stood trembling with emotion. She put her hands on Teresa's shoulders. 'What's happening to us, Teresa?'

'I don't know, Blanche. I don't know.' Teresa could barely get the words out.

'I... I feel things for you I don't understand. I...'

Teresa put her arms around Blanche's waist. 'Hold me,' she whispered fiercely. She pulled Blanche tight against her body. Teresa knew what passion was, and what she was feeling right now was passion. Of a kind and intensity she had never experienced before. Nearly uncontrollable passion. Why it was happening with Blanche... with a woman. Her head whirled with desire.⁴¹

By the end of their journey (and the female protagonists of Cameron's novels undergo similar transformations on or after *their* trans-American treks), the ungainly Blanche has realised her true, butch, potential; saloon whore Teresa has put her degrading life behind

⁴¹ Penny Hayes, *The Long Trail* (Tallahassee, 1986), p. 129.

her and committed herself to a life of loving women. Like *Patience and Sarah* (with which its publishers were eager to compare it⁴²), this novel ends on the securing of lesbian space: assisted by Blanche's Aunt Irene and her lesbian lover, the two lovers establish their own homestead in a community of sympathetic female friends.

As in so many gay men's historical romances, Blanche and Teresa overcome cultural limitations by following the imperatives of the *body*; unlike Willie Smith's quest in *Street Lavender*, however, their journey takes them not through the overpopulated urban landscape of homosexual categorisation, but over hostile, uncharted terrain. What such novels dramatise is a spontaneous *coming-to-lesbianism*, a kind of getting of lesbian wisdom, achieved against all cultural expectations. While the authors of gay male romances recognise the late nineteenth century as a turning-point in homosexual history, lesbian writers - precisely like those champions of romantic friendship who effectively hearken back to a 'Golden Age' of female bonding⁴³ - celebrate its earlier decades as an era gloriously *pre-dating* lesbian naming, a period in which women could make the journey to self-knowledge apparently on their own terms.

If the western genre allows for the dramatisation of lesbian *pioneering*, the Regency/gothic romance formula enables the same journey - from innocence to experience - to be made rather differently. Traditionally, the genre details the problematic relationship between a beautiful virgin of uncertain means and the wealthy, enigmatic, sexually mature man with whom she falls in love. The conclusion of the novel brings resolution and marriage; mysteries are dispelled. More importantly, the woman enters into full accession of both her sexual and her economic estate: finds a legitimate outlet for her natural but hitherto alarming erotic desires, and, not infrequently, becomes mistress of her husband's property.⁴⁴ Though the lesbian historical romance has necessarily transformed some aspects of the gothic plot - most obviously, its heroine moves not into marriage and heterosexual privilege but *away* from convention and social approbation -

⁴² "Destined to Become a Classic", promises the back cover of the 1986 edition. "Not since *Patience and Sarah* has there been such a novel as... *The Long Trail*".

⁴³ For a critique of lesbian 'Golden Age' theories, see Liz Stanley's 'Romantic Friendship? Some issues in researching lesbian history and biography', in *Women's History Review* 1 (2) (1992), pp. 193-216.

⁴⁴ We might see du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938) - which itself echoes Brontë's *Jane Eyre* - as the modern gothic prototype to which Holt's *Mistress of Mellyn* (1960) and a host of similar pulp romances subsequently returned the historical setting.

it has nevertheless retained the formula which brings together *ingénue* and sexual *savante*.⁴⁵ In Victoria Ramstetter's *The Marquise and the Novice* (1981), for example, Kathleen, restless postulant in a French convent, is sent as a governess to the chateau of the enigmatic Annelise de Rochelle; in Michelle Martin's *Pembroke Park* (1986) and Lori Paige's *Passion's Legacy* (1991), disgruntled gentlewomen Joanna and Sarah fall under the spell of unconventional aristocrats: Lady Diana March straddles her horse in male attire and decorates her country house with Turkish cushions instead of sofas, Lady Pym has a locked bookcase of obscure (presumably *very* obscure) lesbian novels. The savantes provoke passionate but conflicting sensations of desire, fear and above all *bewilderment* in their ingenuous admirers; dramatising the getting of lesbian wisdom, these novels exploit, even fetishize, the sexual ingenuousness of their lesbian subjects:

She felt out of control - a new and terrifying sensation. Lady March had done something - Joanna was not quite sure what - to throw her off balance. She felt a little naked and very, very frightened. (*Pembroke Park*, 32)

Despite the different setting, this is precisely the same confusion experienced by the heroines of lesbian westerns - Blanche and Teresa, as we've seen, but also Margarita in Hayes' *Yellowthroat* (1988), who watches the naked, sleeping Julia "with thirsty eyes. She wanted to... to... She could not identify her longing".⁴⁶ Though, like *The Green Scamander*, these romances posit lesbian erotic exchange as initially ocular, they invoke a rather different frame of reference to Meagher's novel, which, as I've suggested, exploits a certain semantic slipperiness to work its coded lesbian effects. Here, of course, the reader of these self-identified lesbian texts *can* identify Margarita's longing - and Maddie's, and Joanna's - all too well. These romances are, in Todorov's sense, *gnoseological* novels: texts, like detective stories, which foreground a "search for knowledge", and work to bring two complementary but disparate narratives into line: in this case, that of the *ingénue* and that of the *savante* (which is also that of the reader),

⁴⁵ The Regency/gothic genre first succumbed to lesbian appropriation with Victoria Ramstetter's *The Marquise and the Novice* (Tallahassee, 1981); similar, more recent titles include Michelle Martin's *Pembroke Park* (Tallahassee, 1986), Kim Larabee's *Behind the Mask* (Boston, 1989), Lori A. Paige's *Passion's Legacy* (Tallahassee, 1991) and Barbara Johnson's *Stonehurst* (Tallahassee, 1992). Page references to all of these will be included in the text.

⁴⁶ Penny Hayes, *Yellowthroat* (Tallahassee, 1988), p. 81.

who are admitted to a shared level of lesbian knowledge at the novel's conclusion.⁴⁷

This gnoseological disparity provides the lesbian historical romance with the dynamic of *difference* which, as Anne Cranny-Francis has argued, is an essential feature of the romance genre.⁴⁸ The lesbian ingénues of these novels have to be instructed in or initiated into the mechanics of lesbian love-making:

Allie was stirring against her, her body desperately begging for more. Maddie stopped, confused. 'Allie, love, please show me what to do.' (*Behind the Mask*, 66)

Often, indeed, as in much heterosexual romance, the experiential disparity is itself a source of erotic pleasure, for ingénue, savante and (in theory, at least) reader alike:

Sarah [...] felt the curve of a smile transform Augusta's kiss against her shoulder. 'As when we danced,' she whispered into yielding flesh. 'I have much to teach you, Miss Lindsay.'
'There is much I wish to learn.' (*Passion's Legacy*, 120)

As she tore my nightshift from my burning, writhing body, she growled, 'Remember, *you* are the neophyte.' (*The Marquise and the Novice*, 86)

However, as in *The Long Trail*, lesbian innocence is not a natural state, but the result of patriarchal enculturation; to lesbian knowledge - and despite their apparent need for instruction - all novices have an instinctual claim: ingenuous, they are also conveniently *ingenious*.

Because I did not know what else to do, I did what my entire being wanted to do - I pulled her down on top of me. [...] I caught her face in my hands as she had caught mine earlier, and we began to kiss. My lips finally opened to her probing tongue.

Although I was completely inexperienced, my instincts served me well that night. (*The Marquise and the Novice*, 86)

Accession to the lesbian estate brings its subjects into harmony with their own estranged natures: takes them, as the title of Kim Larabee's 1989 story of lesbian highway robbery suggests, *Behind the Mask*:

⁴⁷ Tzvetan Todorov, *Genres in Discourse* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 33.

⁴⁸ See her chapter on the romance in *Feminist Fiction* (London, 1990).

She sat washed in the feeling of total rightness. Last night had erased all the doubt, fear, and confusion. Gone was the feeling of being out of step with society, that feeling of being a misfit.

The consummation of her love for Allie had taken her outside of society altogether. She saw clearly that she had never been truly a part of her culture, and that her previous unhappiness had been a result of her denial of that fact. (*Behind the Mask*, 74)

Behind the mask of patriarchal convention, such novels imply, lie more basic lesbian impulses. The getting of lesbian wisdom is also a kind of return (Hannah, in *Home Again*, *Home Again*, experiences her reading of Sappho as a *homecoming*): it presupposes and redresses a prior *forgetting* of something *already* known, on the deepest possible level.

Their gnoseological disparities resolved, lesbian historical novels lack the dynamic which might impel them into an exploration of the happy lesbian union; their conclusions, like those of ~~the gay men's romances, we looked at in chapter 9,~~ frequently bring their lovers together in a transcendent, timeless clinch - an embrace like that enjoyed by Sarah and Augusta in *Passion's Legacy*, for example, in which they feel "eternity shelter[ing] their union" (206). More generally, having gained full lesbian subjectivity on their own terms, the lesbian heroines of historical romances are frequently rewarded with a rudimentary lesbian community - a place with their lover in the house of an older lesbian relative, for example (*Stonehurst*, *Passion's Legacy*, *Behind the Mask*), or lesbian - and occasionally gay male - friends (*Pembroke Park*); but, crucially, such privileges are the fruits of lesbian knowledge, not, as we've seen, the *means to* such knowledge. As in *Patience and Sarah*, the lesbianism imagined by these historical romances is a- or pre-discursive; but - again, as in Miller's novel, and Hayes' - these texts exploit the very historical underfunding upon which they insist, to imagine a lesbianism that is heroically free from cultural naming.

If the gay men's historical genre tends, often ironically, towards pornography, then the lesbian historical novel's closest relative is, perhaps, the coming-out story.⁴⁹ Consider the genre, for example, in relation to Biddy Martin's description of the anthologised lesbian coming-out stories of the 1970s:

⁴⁹ Or, even, the science fiction novel: both genres endorse what Sonya Andermahr has identified as a 'utopian' lesbian model, in which gender distinctions are essentialised, and lesbian sexuality is a prerogative to which all women, once liberated from patriarchal ideology, have the potential to 'return'. See her 'The Politics of Separatism and Lesbian Utopian Fiction', in Sally Munt (ed.), *New Lesbian Criticism: Literary and Cultural Readings* (Hemel Hempstead, 1992), pp. 133-52.

Many of the coming-out stories are tautological insofar as they describe a process of coming to know something that has always been true, a truth to which the author has returned. They also describe a linear progression from a past shrouded in confusion or lies to a present or future that represents a liberation from the past. Coming out is conceived, then, as both a return to one's true self and desire and a movement beyond distortion and constraint, grounding identity and political unity in moral right and truth. The titles alone [...] - *The Lesbian Path*, *Lesbian Crossroads*, *Coming Out Stories* - point to the conception of lesbianism and of life story as a journey, as a 'meta-ethical' journey à la Mary Daly from patriarchal distortion to a woman-identified consciousness, a choice, finally, to be who one is in a new world of women.⁵⁰

Like the lesbian testimonies Martin describes, lesbian Regencies/gothics and westerns imagine a lesbianism that is neither being continually reinvented, nor always the same, but that is continually being reinvented in the *same* way, *as* the same thing.⁵¹ Paradoxically, they deny lesbian tradition - as the cultural or discursive phenomenon that Judy Grahn, for example, has imagined - even as they seem to be affirming it; and it is thus no wonder that lesbian historical romances so rarely address themselves to lesbian *subcultures*, nor that they should remain content, like *Patience and Sarah*, to locate lesbianism in the interstices, rather than the repressed heart, of historical narrative. Instead of receiving this dominant lesbian historical mode at face value, as the natural articulation of historical circumstance (the apparent paucity of lesbian models), we might more usefully read it as a *vehicle* for *contemporary* lesbian ideas about what lesbianism is, could be or should be - ideas which are served by *maintaining* an underfunded lesbian history. The lesbian historical romance clearly enacts compelling lesbian fantasies - not just erotic fantasies, which might be all that a superficial reading of these texts would recognise, but those basic myths of origins with which modern lesbian culture has elected to understand itself.

As we shall see in a moment, not all lesbian historical novels collude with the romance in the obfuscation of their own historiographical partialities; there may, moreover, be signs that the genre's thrall to the particular ideology of lesbian feminism is weakening,

⁵⁰ Biddy Martin, 'Lesbian Identity and Autobiographical Difference[s]', in Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale and David M. Halperin (eds.), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (New York and London, 1993), pp. 274-93, p. 281.

⁵¹ It is therefore no surprise at all that Isabel Miller's more recent lesbian romance - the story of lovers Patrícia and Sharon, *Side By Side* (1990) - quite deliberately reconstructs *Patience and Sarah* with a modern setting.

as that ideology loses its authority over lesbian culture.⁵² Lesbian historical fantasies will surely change, too, as historians redraw the shape of lesbian history itself: the publication of the diaries of Anne Lister, for example, may influence the representation of nineteenth- and eighteenth-century erotic knowledge⁵³ - though the suspicion and reluctance with which the Lister diaries have been received by lesbians hints, once again, at the extraordinary investment the community seems to have in maintaining an underfunded historical model.⁵⁴ Similarly influential might be the recovery of older 'lesbian' discourses by studies such as Emma Donoghue's *Passions Between Women* (1993). Indeed, it is the very issue of women's access to lesbian knowledge that is addressed in Donoghue's own lesbian historical fiction, the 1993 'Words for Things'. This short story introduces a new vocabulary - "tribade", "tommie" - into a genre previously reliant upon a fetishisation of lesbian *inarticulacy*.⁵⁵ Increasingly, too, the genre seems to be embracing parody and self-parody, and to be displaying a crucial willingness to look beyond historical model into blatant historical *fantasy*. ReBecca Béguin's (*Searching for Miss Poole*) *In Unlikely Places* (1990), for example, superimposes a lesbian plot onto Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*; Iona McGregor's *Death Wore a Diadem* (1989) presents lesbian history not as a pastiche of heterosexual or homosocial forms, but as a negotiation of specifically lesbian intertexts; in Bryony Lavery's play *Her Aching Heart* (1990) and Frances Gapper's 1991 short story 'The Secret of Sorrerby Rise', the conventions of both the traditional *and* the lesbian historical romance are subverted. For many lesbians, indeed, the destabilising of historical authority has provided the starting-point for an historical fantasising which may ironically recall, but which remains ultimately

⁵² On the other hand, of course, the threat to a distinctly lesbian feminist identity that some lesbians have identified in new lesbian and gay identifications - most notably, perhaps, in 'queer' positionings - may have the effect of bolstering the genre in its affirmation of an ahistorical, prediscursive lesbianism.

⁵³ Anne Lister was an early nineteenth-century upper middle-class English woman who, in relative secrecy but with no apparent social opposition, enjoyed a series of passionate lesbian relationships. Her accounts of these, transcribed from her original coded journals, have since been published as Helena Whitbread (ed.), *I Know My Own Heart: The Diaries of Anne Lister (1791-1840)* (London, 1988) and Helena Whitbread (ed.), *No Priest But Love: The Journals of Anne Lister from 1824-1826* (Otley, 1992). The latter volume, interestingly enough, sports a hand-drawn front-cover illustration - of two smooching Victorian (sic) ladies - that would not look out of place on a lesbian historical romance.

⁵⁴ Terry Castle discusses (and discounts) the telling rumours that the Lister diaries were an elaborate hoax, in her *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York, 1993), pp. 11 and 243.

⁵⁵ Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women: British lesbian culture 1668-1801* (London, 1993); Emma Donoghue, 'Words for Things', in Margaret Reynolds (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Lesbian Short Stories* (Harmondsworth, 1993).

unhampered by, actual historical model. In Tessa Boffin's photographic series 'The Knight's Move' (1990), women pose in period costume as a variety of recognisable historical personae - knight, page, lady-in-waiting - and carry placards on which the famous names of the lesbian canon - 'Una Troubridge', 'Alice Austen', 'Janet Flanner', 'Sappho', 'Radclyffe Hall' - are simultaneously isolated and forced into anachronistic intimacy. Boffin argues that, while the rediscovery of lesbian history is necessary, it is also restricting; she urges lesbians to *fabricate* as well as rediscover:

The burdens imposed by [the scarcity of lesbian representation] can [...] be overcome if we go beyond our impoverished archives to create new icons. One way we can move forward is by embracing our idealised fantasy figures, by placing ourselves into the great heterosexual narratives of courtly and romantic love. [...] We] have to produce ourselves through representations in the present, here and now.⁵⁶

Boffin might be responding to Monique Wittig's famous plea that we "[m]ake an effort to remember, and failing that, invent".⁵⁷

What has complicated but also charged lesbian historical fiction still further is the recognition that lesbian histories are *always*, of necessity, to some extent also inventions; like those gay men's historical fictions which return us to the modern gay fantasist himself, some lesbian novels undertake not simply to *reflect* contemporary lesbian mythology, but reflect *on* it. While novels such as *Out of Time* and *The Fires of Bride* present lesbian historiography - the relationship between past lesbians and the modern-day ones who make a career out of telling their stories - as an exemplary expression of feminist solidarity, other novels see the historiographical process as potentially far less benign. Caeia March's *The Hide and Seek Files* (1988), for example, is suspicious of the politics of historical recuperation, feminist or otherwise. The relationship between Moss and Biff, the novel's oldest lesbian characters, is literally 'hidden': by disguise (like Allard's Philippa/Philippe, Biff has lived her life in their Yorkshire mining village as her lover's common-law husband); by the sexist and heterosexist occlusions to which all lesbian experience is liable; and by the silences imposed upon working-class lesbians in particular. Moss and Biff's story is the underside, however, of even received *lesbian*

⁵⁶ Tessa Boffin, 'The Knight's Move', in Boffin and Fraser (eds.), *Stolen Glances: Lesbians Take Photographs* (London, 1991), pp. 42-50, p. 49.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Duncker, *Sisters and Strangers*, p. 123.

history: reading *Orlando* to one another, or listening to Vita Sackville-West's radio broadcasts, they periodically touch upon the lesbian grand narratives, but are ultimately elided by them. The runaway Moss is given a lift by Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge, on a motoring holiday in the Dales: they drop her near Pontefract and drive back to London in their elegant car; Moss' first lover Florence, raped by the local Squire, fills her pockets with stones and drowns herself: an uncanny but uncelebrated precursor of that more famous lesbian suicide, Virginia Woolf. In contrast (and, perhaps, unconscious response) to the jacket illustration for *Patience and Sarah*, this novel's cover gives us a lesbian couple *beneath* an *industrial* landscape, at the lowest stratum of a rock- and coal-face, requiring, as it were, lesbian excavation (figure 7).⁵⁸

What's more, despite the ambitions of the novel's numerous feminist 'seekers' (including, perhaps, its readers), Moss and Biff's secret *remains*, effectively, hidden. Lerryn, a young lesbian, intuits the real nature of their relationship; through her they come into contact with the lesbian feminist movement, and read *Spare Rib*; but they remain wary of modern labels and definitions, and Biff's secret never becomes grist for the middle-class feminist mill. After Biff's death, Moss continues to respect her disguise:

She could not trust strangers whether they were feminists or not, lesbians or not (the word came more easily to her these days), with the fact of Biff's life. They might sensationalise it, trash it, ridicule it, anything, even use it somehow for their own careers. She wasn't sure how, but she would not expose Biff to the world like that. (264)

In Jan Clausen's *The Prosperine Papers* (1988), the narrator's grandmother proves similarly resistant to feminist appropriation, and destroys the papers of her Labour campaigning companion, in which her academic granddaughter had seen the promise of a lesbian historiographical *coup*. In *Zoe's Book* (1976), by Gail Pass, the secret lesbian history with which the novel's unnamed narrator is tantalised and becomes increasingly obsessed - the story of obscure Bloomsbury figures Zoe Mohr and Julia Carroll - turns out to be an illusion, a fiction conjured up by the aged Mohr herself. All three of these novels acknowledge lesbian history's enormous *pull*, but query the notion of easy lesbian access to it. What's more, as their titles suggest, they acknowledge the fact that history - even lesbian history - can never exist as anything other than *text*: fragile, insubstantial,

⁵⁸ Cacia March, *The Hide and Seek Files* (London, 1988). Page references will be included in the text.

with stable signification never assured.

If, in March's and Clausen's novels at least, the relationship between historical experience and historical narrative is problematised by class, in Katherine Sturtevant's *A Mistress Moderately Fair* (1988) it is complicated by race. The novel reproduces many of the tropes which we have seen at work in the classic lesbian historical romances. Margaret Featherstone, its seventeenth-century playwright heroine, has a secret: a "strange, frightening desire that [...] compel[s] her into sin" - a lesbian desire which visits her in dreams, and which she attempts, in horror, to repress.⁵⁹ But her efforts prove fruitless in the face of the spirited, independent actress, Amy Dudley; the two women become lovers:

And now she was bereft of her own clothing. She tried to cover her nakedness with her arms for a shamed instant, but Margaret took her hands gently in her own, and gazed unwaveringly upon her flesh. Then she raised her eyes to meet Amy's, and saw there the strange look of terror and defiance she had surprised before on Amy's face.

She could not answer it with words. (100)

But though here they lack the language with which to articulate their passion, this novel does not see its lesbian lovers taken to a place *beyond* language; it understands them, rather, to *revise* patriarchal discourse, as they become one another's 'mistresses' (241). Words are, in fact, Margaret's medium, and allow her to challenge the cultural model in which women may act only the role of 'fool, scold or slut' (182). She writes a play especially for Amy, in which she exposes women's exploitation at the hands of men; it is in the playhouse, and upon her glorious success, that the novel optimistically closes.

But the novel does not, quite, end there; its final paragraph gestures, in fact, towards a new story. For *A Mistress Moderately Fair* is concerned also with the *limits* of lesbian knowledge; its romantic narrative is, throughout, punctuated by scenes from the story of Kicharuzi, the black servant whose services Margaret has on rent from her neighbour, Mrs Green. If Margaret and Amy must negotiate patriarchal linguistic prescription, Kicharuzi, forced to communicate in an alien language and given a Christian name, Susan, because her own is too difficult to pronounce, has an even more tenuous

⁵⁹ Katherine Sturtevant, *A Mistress Moderately Fair* (Boston, 1988), p. 33. Further references will be included in the text.

hold on identity. For her, the concept of "mistress" is a horrifyingly real one: she wears a brass collar around her neck, with Mrs Green's name inscribed upon it; and, though she longs for her homeland, "Africa" - the English word - means nothing to her. Margaret and Amy grow fond of Kicharuzi - eventually they buy her and have her collar removed; but she remains, to them, an enigma. Kicharuzi's desire for liberty forms the subtext to this novel of white erotic wants: Sturtevant refuses the timeless narrative closure in which romance is divorced from historical specifics. While Margaret and Amy are enjoying their feminist success in the playhouse, Kicharuzi is stealing enough of their silver to buy herself a passage away from England with the disreputable Captain Horn. It is this journey - "Toward the ships. Toward Africa" (249) - that the end of the novel anticipates.

By having Kicharuzi's journey take place beyond the limits of her text, Sturtevant seems to be suggesting that her lesbian romance is an inadequate vehicle for the articulation of black historical experience: she points us towards the lacunae in the genre, but does not really attempt to fill them; she implies, perhaps, that there is no room in the lesbian and gay historical genre for anything other than this kind of gesturing. But her text is already a revisionary one: if it has managed to dismantle the heterosexual historical romance formula and reassemble it in such a way as to render it accountable to lesbian experience, why is it somehow incapable of addressing, more fully, black experience? I suspect that Sturtevant's limits are self-imposed. We might read this as the same kind of "fear of intimacy" with the black perspective that Judith Roof recognises, and condemns, in the work of white feminist critics;⁶⁰ alternatively, we might read in Sturtevant's reticence a reluctance to monopolise black literary territory. Denny, the narrator of March's *Fire! Fire!*, has, similarly, only a partial vision of the relationship between Candace and Bess, seventeenth-century black lesbians, because both she and her ghostly early modern 'contact', Roarie, are white: "'there are things they don't tell you,'" she prompts Roarie. "'Things they can't share with you. Won't share with you, er, and er, it's hard to translate but it's to do with respect not just eavesdropping on private, I mean personal stuff.'" ⁶¹

But though some white lesbians have stepped aside to let black writers recover their own histories, black lesbians and gays, as I noted in my Introduction, have tended

⁶⁰ Judith Roof, *A Lure of Knowledge: Lesbian Sexuality and Theory* (New York, 1991), p. 227.

⁶¹ Cacia March, *Fire! Fire!* (London, 1991), pp. 16-17.

not to use the historical genre to do so. To look for a black lesbian and gay historical *oeuvre* within, or running complementary to, the white genre may even be to impose inappropriate expectations upon black writers (who, for one thing, may elect to channel their energies into the production of black *rather* than homosexual histories: "Do not assume about our sexuality," cautions black British poet Dorothea Smartt; "it may not always remain a pivotal focus in our writing; but become integrated into all the same difference of being a Blackwoman in a white society"⁶²). What is suggested by the one black novel that we might want to identify as belonging to the genre - Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* (1991) - is that black lesbian writers might be less interested in claiming a distinct, necessarily exclusive history, than in confounding dominant assumptions about both history, and about (racial/sexual) category itself.

Gomez's novel is, indeed, only *semi*-historical. A vampire story, its central character is immortal, and Gomez depicts moments in her long life - 'Yerba Buena: 1890', 'Rosebud, Missouri: 1921', 'South End: 1955', and so on - in which she remains, effectively, ageless: born on a Missouri plantation to a Fulani mother, her career encompasses the broad sweep of African-American experience itself. Willingly vampirised in the 1850s by the white woman who rescues her when she flees her plantation, Gilda is reborn into a new "family" - the network of immortals throughout the world who remain in more or less continuous psychic contact with one another. These vampires suck blood but they do not kill; rather, they use feeding as a time of *exchange*, inserting calming and beneficent thoughts into the minds of the humans whose blood they steal. Periodically they create new "family" members. Gilda vampirises a man, Julius, in 1971; the process - a double exchange of blood - is both erotic and nurturing, but not necessarily sexual: Gilda's primary bonds are with women - Bird, a native American who lives at the brothel in the 1850s; Effie, a black vampire she meets in 1980s New York.

What *The Gilda Stories* represents is the attempt to imagine a category that transcends race, sexual orientation and gender even as it acknowledges the primacy of racial identity and is modelled on black and gay subcultural experience. It does this in part by disrupting traditional ideas about *blood*. As Gilda moves through the twentieth century she retains a sense of history, in which the recognition of both her Fulani heritage

⁶² Dorothea Smartt, 'From My Eyes... Zamis Publishing Poetry 1984-1988', in Elaine Hobby and Chris White (eds.), *What Lesbians Do in Books* (London, 1991), pp. 226-38, p. 227.

(her *bloodline*) and its status within white, racist culture (her 'inferior' *bloodstock*) play a vital role; the black historian is apparently ^{more} privileged than the white lesbian or gay historiographer for whom pre-sexological sexual identities must always be a matter of speculation: the Firebrand edition of *The Gilda Stories* is illustrated not with a fantasy lesbian embrace, but ^{with} an early twentieth-century photograph of Gomez's black great-aunt.⁶³ But in the multi-racial vampire community 'family' and 'race' can be extended at will: her blood - the blood that literally runs in her veins - is the stolen blood of whites and blacks alike. In this novel the traditional assumptions made to establish both 'humanity' and 'humaneness' are thrown into question. To Gilda's mother the whites who own her are "not fully human" (10); vampires, on the other hand, are not, as they are in traditional manifestations of the genre, 'undead': rather, they offer an alternative way of, and into, "life".

These redefinitions have obvious resonances for lesbians and gay men, also often described - particularly in black parlance - as being "in the life".⁶⁴ During her stay in Yerba Buena (San Francisco), Gilda lives with Sorel and Anthony, white male vampires who are also lovers. As they will do a century later in New York, Sorel and Anthony run a bar, a place where the vampire community can meet, but where they can mingle with the establishment's mortal customers unrecognised. As Richard Dyer has noted, the vampire formula, with its emphasis upon "secret erotic practice", has often lent itself for construction as homosexual analogy;⁶⁵ consider this scene, in which Gilda and Anthony prowl the docks of Yerba Buena, looking for blood:

A young man stood near the entrance to a lodging house about to light a cigar. Gilda stepped into the shadows; Anthony walked up to him with a match in hand. As he struck the match his gaze caught the man and he walked him backward out of the lamplight. There was no sound, but Gilda was able to peer into the darkness and see through it, observing Anthony in the secret moment of exchange. She looked away toward the lights that sprayed up the hills behind them and waited. Quickly it was done. She heard Anthony speak softly to the man leaning weakly against the wall. Then he lit the match and held it to the dark cheroot still in the man's hand.

⁶³ Jewelle Gomez, *The Gilda Stories: A Novel* (Ithaca, 1991). Page references will be included in the text.

⁶⁴ "In the life, a phrase used to describe 'street life' (the lifestyle of pimps, prostitutes, hustlers, and drug dealers) is also the phrase used to describe the 'gay life' (the lives of Black homosexual men and women)": Joseph Beam, *In the Life: a Black Gay Anthology* (Boston, 1986), p. 12.

⁶⁵ Richard Dyer, 'Children of the Night: Vampirism as Homosexuality, Homosexuality as Vampirism', in Radstone, *Sweet Dreams*, pp. 47-72, p. 58.

The man said 'thankyou' in a rather thin voice and took a deep inhalation of the smoke. Anthony returned to Gilda's side. Together they walked in silence further along the docks. (66-7)

As in so much gay historical fiction, Gomez's vision is of a community driven to slake its 'deviant' desires by the urgings of its bodies - bodies and desires that remain unchanged even as human culture evolves - though her emphasis *on* community is one which, as we've seen, lesbian historical romances often resist making. Even more importantly, Gomez's historical constant is subject to *semantic* change. Gilda recognises the fact that vampires - spirits and ha'nts - have had an accepted place in her mother's African culture; they grow less and less compatible with Westernism as the twentieth century progresses; but by 2050, when the novel ends, vampires have become valuable commodities. By then irresponsible governing has pushed the planet to the brink of destruction, the long-term future is no longer secure, and the rich send ruthless hunters in search of vampires, demanding to be made immortal. Gilda finds a safe haven with Effie and Julius, Bird, Anthony and Sorel, in a South American hideaway; their community forms a utopia amidst the degeneration of mortal society in a way that makes yet another redefinition, this time of AIDS imagery. AIDS is not a feature of the late twentieth-century culture through which Gilda passes; the exchange of blood, that most risky of high-risk practices, is offered instead as an act of grace, the potential salvation of a planet which has doomed itself through greed and exploitation. Observing the logic of an imaginary category - vampirism - *The Gilda Stories* problematises those categories - categories of disease, and of foreignness - in opposition to which white, heterosexual culture continues to define itself.

The Gilda Stories is an optimistic novel, a novel which both defends separatism and celebrates separatist diversity, respects tradition and understands the problems of tradition-making. Like so many of the other texts we have looked at in this chapter, its value lies less in its efforts to recreate or even imagine a past - typically, indeed, it undermines its own claims to historical authenticity with fantasy - than in its attempt to trouble our epistemological assumptions. Such novels remind us that, as gay men and lesbians, black and white, we must continue to test the limits of traditional historiography even as we look beyond them; but that, too, we must be alert to the limits of our own historiographical practices, our own histories.

CONCLUSION

In the shifting landscape of homosexual historical speculation, certain features unmistakably endure: rifts narrow, or even appear to widen, but never quite disappear; older structures, long since outmoded and fallen away, nevertheless leave deep and resilient foundations. As novels such as Hunt's *Street Lavender* and Harrison's *The Alexandrian Drachma* testify, it is partly in these striking and poignant continuities that the appeal of lesbian and gay retrospection lies: looking back upon our own history, we seem to see others like us, reassuringly engaged in precisely our own project; our histories seem merely to bring theirs up to date.

Any history of lesbian and gay culture should address and cherish these continuities and repetitions; we might even wish to identify - as I have done here, at times - a 'tradition' of homosexual retrospection, and place ourselves in it. But the more interesting implications of the lesbian and gay metahistory outlined in this thesis, I would suggest, are not those which reaffirm our sexual categories, but those which trouble and unsettle them. To what, after all, do the texts we have examined collectively testify, if not the *tenuousness* of homosexual 'history' and, by implication, of 'homosexuality' itself? For most of the commentators considered in these chapters, the homosexual past was unrepresentable - perhaps inconceivable - without reference to modern same-sex taxonomy and paradigm; homosexual histories have, indeed, frequently proliferated in precisely those periods which have seen the emergence of new models, or heard the clash of categories in collision. Such histories lead us not into the dubiously homosexual pasts they claim to elucidate or reclaim, but into fantasy, prejudice, and protest - into, in other words, cultural contest and discursive change. The homosexual moments whose particular anxieties they enact may resemble our own, but are ultimately unfamiliar; they might even be best approached by the coining of new terms, or the resurrection of obsolete ones: 'paiderastic' literature, for example, as I suggested in chapters 1 and 2, is only

partially accountable to a 'gay' or even a 'homosexual' model.

For the homosexual retrospective 'tradition' is primarily an evolving and self-critical one, in which continuities are nevertheless crucially redefined by shifting legal and sexological emphases: Renault's invocation of the Hellenic model, for example, though related to Symonds', had its own distinct resonances for a post-war Britain debating the responsibilities of the homosexual citizen, rather than his morphology. Homosexuals have reinvented their own traditions in response to changes in the dominant culture, and in reaction to earlier, once definitive, gay models: if Greek Love was Vivien's revisionary target, then her own Sapphic paradigm was itself challenged by later generations of lesbian fantasists - by Bryher, and by more recent lesbian feminists for whom Bryher's own homoerotic histories have seemed inappropriate.

At the present moment, when a broader range of gay voices are being heard than ever before, the gay past is both well-established and fragile. The very sophistication of contemporary lesbian and gay historiography - its undermining of the various essentialisms which charge so many of the older gay histories recovered by this thesis - has de-authorised homosexual retrospection as a meaningful practice: as Carole S. Vance, discussing constructionist theory, asks, "Is there an 'it'" - a lesbian and gay history - "to study?".¹ As I suggested in chapter 9, the continuing, perhaps increasing, appeal of the lesbian and gay historical romance may be an effect of such developments: the genre simultaneously offers consolation for the demise of history, and celebrates its own liberation into historical fantasy. But as that chapter further revealed, lesbian and gay novelists are also often willing to confront the perils of retrospection along with its pleasures; and for black writers and artists, in particular - Jewelle Gomez, as we've seen; also Isaac Julien, whose filmic 'meditation' *Looking for Langston* "troubles the enforced boundaries between proper history and fictional recuperations of the past"² - producing historical fictions involves interrogating the processes of historical representation, rather than requesting admission to them.

What relationship, finally, should our own attempts to identify and recover

¹ Carole S. Vance, 'Social Construction Theory: Problems in the History of Sexuality', in Dennis Altman et al, *Which Homosexuality?* (London, 1989), pp. 13-34, p. 22

² Scott Bravmann, 'Isaac Julien's *Looking For Langston*: Hughes, Biography and Queer(ed) History', in *Cultural Studies*, 7 (2) (May 1993), pp. 311-23, p. 319.

distinctly lesbian and gay histories have to a homosexual retrospective tradition whose recurring message is, as we have seen, the inevitable provisionality of historical representation and sexual identification? Clearly, we need as critics and historians to acknowledge along with the more thoughtful of the current lesbian and gay historical novelists our own conceptual allegiances and limits. As in so many of the texts I have examined, the history uncovered in this thesis is to some extent an artificial, and certainly a contingent, one. It could not, for one thing, have been formulated outside of the context of 'lesbian and gay studies', the academic discipline upon which it draws, and to which it attempts to contribute; but it also bears the influence of the *particular* lesbian and gay moment in which it has been produced - a moment in which, ironically, 'lesbian and gay' categories are becoming increasingly unstable. I have not engaged explicitly with 'queer' theory in my chapters; its challenges to the authority of homosexual identities, however, its compelling calls for the forging of new alliances between men and women across a range of sexually dissident practices, have undoubtedly influenced their shape and scope. One feature of the thesis that was unanticipated at the start of my research is its impatience with the limits of the lesbian historical/literary canon, its favouring of precisely those 'queerer' writers - 'Michael Field', Bryher - whose work resists and problematises sexual categorisation. Queer theory undoubtedly offers us ways to recover areas of the historical spectrum of lesbian identifications, erotic and literary, that lesbian feminist criticism has elided or misrepresented: resisting the imposition of some modern lesbian and gay paradigms on the homosexual past, however, we will nevertheless clearly impose others. This is, perhaps, as appropriate as it is inevitable: the historical narratives to which same-sex lovers have repeatedly appealed have been subtly rewritten with each appeal; lesbian and gay histories - and metahistories - must similarly continue to proliferate, and to change.

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